THE PHILOSOPHY OF NĀGĀRJUNA

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

It was in the Spring of 1962 that I happened to mention to Dr. Julio Simon, the then director of the Pabellón Argentina, at the Cité Universitaire, the visit which Professor Vicente Fatone had paid to the College of Indology, Banaras Hindu University, two or three years earlier. At that time Professor Fatone was serving as ambassador for Argentina in India. During his visit he gave a lecture in which he compared the notions of time in Indian and in Western metaphysics. I was pleased to discover that Dr. J. Simon was a close friend of Professor Fatone. I expressed my wish to translate his work on the philosophy of Nāgārjuna. Professor Fatone was agreeable to the idea and he sent me an autographed copy of his book which had just appeared in Buenos Aires. In particular he was eager to have his views known to Indologists who did not know the Spanish language. He was especially desirous to acquaint the Indian scholars of his interpretation of the mādhyamika metaphysics.

On account of my commitments over the years it was not possible for me to bring forth this translation earlier. I regret it. However, I feel somewhat gratified that it is finally presented to the English-speaking reader, with the hope that it will enable the students of Indian philosophy to appreciate the serious work done by one of the major philosophical scholars of Latin America. In a more

concrete sense this translation may help bring about some awareness, in the minds of the Indian scholars, of the value and necessity of studies in the history and civilisation of Latin America.

Throughout this translation I have endeavoured to respect the thought of the author, without sacrificing the demands of style and clarity required by the new medium. To this effect I owe a debt of deep gratitude to Professor Hilda Chen Apuy E., of the University of Costa Rica, and to Miss Beata Grant, of the University of Arizona, who have most patiently read my manuscript and offered valuable suggestions.

University of Alberta,
Edmonton. D. Prithipaul
July, 1978.

CONTENTS

PROLOGUE

In these pages, we propose to interpret the thought of Nāgārjuna, the second century Buddhist philosopher, whose influence has persisted in the modern forms of the religion founded by Śākyamuni. We do not pretend to have always interpreted the thought with accuracy, despite the great use we have made of the studies of those indologists interested in its elucidation. It would have been impossible to write these pages (which we would have liked to see justified in other works, different and better, also written in our own circles) without the painstaking work, with conclusions which not only do not agree but are even contradictory, done on Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese texts, especially by La Vallée Poussin in Belgium, Stcherbatski in the U.S.S.R., Tucci in Italy, Wallesor in Germany and Schayer in Poland.

Our interpretation differs, in some respects, from that offered by those who have endeavoured to unravel the meaning of those texts most assuredly attributable to Nāgārjuna. We have considered it necessary to insist on showing that Nāgārjuna is not a "nihilist," although certain eminent scholars continue to use this term to designate his school. Also, we do agree with the interpretation which holds that the fundamental idea of his "system" is

that nothing exists except "one single substance which is the world *sub specie aeternitatis*." We do not believe that Nāgārjuna represents a faithful expression of early Buddhism, but neither do we believe that it is possible to find in his ideas a total negation of Buddhism. We believe that, without conforming faithfully to the original thought of Buddhism as evinced by the Canon, Nāgārjuna proceeds exclusively from the data contained in the latter and arrives at more extreme conclusions by submitting all problems to the negative method, a method which the founder of Buddhism would have adopted, only with regard to a certain number of problems irrelevant to the obtaining of nirvāṇa.

None of the problems which Nāgārjuna poses and tries to solve are unknown in the West. Rather its interest resides in the fact that he gives us, in condensed form as it were, many problems which Western philosophy has considered through the centuries. Often the discussion of these problems is irritating on account of its prolixity and tedious on account of its superfluous analysis. But this is a characteristic of all Indian thought which begins with a presentation in the form of aphorisms and is immediately followed, on account of this defect, by the plethora of commentaries and commentaries on commentaries, concluding with a confused hypercriticism where it is easier to lose one's way than to make any discovery.

In spite of the temptations which will assuredly also assail the reader, we have deliberately avoided making any comparison with western thought.

The Legend of Nāgārjuna. The legends attribute a brahminical origin to Nāgārjuna who was the son

of a Brahman who had in a dream received the prophecy that he could not obtain a progeny unless he prepared a feast for a hundred priests. Nāgārjuna was condemned to a precarious life despite the favourable signs that accompanied his birth. According to the Tibetan legend of Bu-Ston[1] in order to enable the child to live seven months it was necessary for the parents to offer a second feast and again a third in order that he be able to reach the age of seven years. When the end of this period drew near, the parents decided that, accompanied by a servant, Nāgārjuna should go on a pilgrimage. The child reached the famous university of Nālandā where a monk urged him to adopt the monastic life as a last resort in order to avoid death. He was ordained according to the ceremony of the magic circle of the Buddha of unlimited life (Amitāyu) and for guide the rector of the university himself !

According to another version, the child, after having studied the four Vedas, took to worldly pleasures. Knowing the technique which makes men invisible, he broke into people's homes until one day he was discovered and nearly paid with his life for those nocturnal visits. His life would have been saved by the promise to become a follower of Buddha, a promise which he made in front of the sepulchre of the founder of the doctrine. Within a few days he acquired the knowledge of the three baskets which constitute the Buddhist canon. Then, in the Himalayas, a monk revealed to him the knowledge of the "fourth" basket, which contained the teachings of the "great vehicle."

While studying at the University of Nālandā,[2]

Nāgārjuna had discovered the method by which objects could be transmuted into gold, and thanks to that he was able, when times were difficult for the monks, to procure what was necessary to keep them from starving to death. Incensed by Nāgārjuna's acting secretly, the monks expelled him from Nālandā and ordered him to build a million monasteries and sanctuaries in order to purify himself. In the meantime Nāgārjuna had been able to, by means of his knowledge, refute Śaṅkara. Two boys who were listening to this remarkable refutation suddenly disappeared under the earth. They were two serpents, *Nāgas*. Nāgārjuna descended to the world of the serpents and obtained the promise that he would be given the materials necessary for the construction of the monasteries. He expounded his doctrine to the King of the Nāgas who requested him to remain with them. Nāgārjuna then explained that he had descended in search not only of materials for the construction of the monasteries, but also of the "Perfection of Knowledge" (*prajñāpāramitā*) of the hundred thousand stanzas.

Omniscient, Nāgārjuna could effect the most extraordinary exploits. He was not ignorant of what was taking place in the heavens, and once reported a war between gods and demons, which was immediately confirmed by an arm which fell from above. He foretold the future; was able to turn mountains into gold and caused those who listened to him to die in order to be reborn transformed into masters. As if these merits were not enough, a Jaina text,[3] adds that Nāgārjuna, exemplary ascetic, son of the King of Nāgas, learnt from his master, after many unsuccessful attempts, to rise in the air by

anointing the soles of his feet with a mysterious substance. A formidable polemist he would have committed suicide by acquiescing to the ardent wish of a follower of the "small vehicle," or to that of a child[4] who, according to other versions, would have been his assassin.[5] This child was impatient to rule, but in order to do so, it was necessary that his father give up receiving the elixir of long life, another discovery of Nāgārjuna's. But perhaps, as the pilgrim I Tsing[6] claims, this elixir was nothing more than the simple hygienic practice which consists in cleaning the teeth with toothpicks.

The legends attribute to Nāgārjuna a life-span of 300 or 600 years, dedicated to teaching the doctrine and writing treatises on the most diverse subjects: medicine, alchemy, astronomy, jewelry, tantric practices, in addition to the works of the "Perfection of Knowledge" and numerous explanatory and polemical texts. His name, Nāga-Arjuna, can be explained because he was the conqueror of the Nāgas; because, like a Nāga, he was born to the true doctrine from the depths of the ocean, and because his doctrine, like the ocean, does not have limits. The eyes of the Nāgas are fiery and resplendent and Nāgārjuna burns and illumines with the fire of his teachings. His power is invincible, like that of Arjuna, conqueror of the enemy hosts. Nevertheless, he could have been named Nāgārjuna simply because he was born at the foot of a tree.

With a greatness comparable only to that of the founder of the community he deserves to be revered — as he himself would have proclaimed — as is the Master. His body bore the 32 signs which distinguish the Perfect Awakened One. The poets of Kashmir[7]

still sing his exploits. His head, severed and petrified,[8] is slowly returning to the trunk after having been carried far away, in order to someday reconstitute the body of the monk.

Thus Nāgārjuna has been a name around which tradition has woven a number of myths and legends. A western indologist[9] has tried to see, in everything concerning Nāgārjuna, a series of symbols related to Śiva. For instance, if Nāgārjuna is said to have been the disciple of Rāhulabhadra, that in itself would signify "in its least allegorical sense," that Buddhism owes much to the *Bhagavad Gītā* and even more to Śivaism. Nāgārjuna would not be a Buddhist monk but rather Śiva himself, for the following reasons: the monks of the "little vehicle" attribute to Nāgārjuna the texts of the "Perfection of Wisdom" (*prajñāpāramitā*). And what is wisdom (*prajñā*)? It is nature, that is, the feminine aspect of Śiva. Moreover, the Prajñāpāramitā books are generally attributed to Time, and Śiva is the personification of the "Great Time." These and other writings of the mahāyānic canon are related to the tantric literature, considered a revelation of Śiva. As can be seen, this explanation does not differ much in its mechanism from that offered by the Buddhist legends themselves.

Western criticism goes so far as to deny the existence of Nāgārjuna and to spread over at least three persons this body of legends.[10] The Nāgārjuna who interests us would be the first of them and would have lived in the second century. The other Nāgārjuna, the alchemist, would have lived in the sixth century and the third, the tantrist, in the tenth century.

PROLOGUE TO THE SECOND EDITION

In these last years, Nāgārjuna's name has been definitely incorporated into the view which western philosophers have been forming of the history of Indian thought. In this connection, one must above all point out the importance which Jaspers gives to the great dialectician in his work *Die Grossen Philosophen* (Munich, 1957). In this book Jaspers analyses, with a thoroughness equal to that which he dedicates to Plotinus and almost as much as that dedicated to Spinoza, the metaphysical attitude of the greatest representative of the "middle school" of the speculative movement which started with Gautama's advent. According to Jaspers' interpretation, Nāgārjuna displays a universality which, seen from the context of the history of western philosophy, presents formal analogies with the dialectics of the second part of Plato's *Parmenides* on one side and, on the other, the contemporary logic of Wittgenstein. Also deserving of mention is the work *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* (London, 1955) of Professor T.R.V. Murti, of the University of Banaras, who expounds Nāgārjuna's thought as an "Absolutism." He unreservedly stands by this position which he considers to be not only the sole metaphysical attitude possible but also a valiant effort capable of preparing the ground

necessary for the spiritual regeneration of the world (p. 341).

In these last years, the bibliography on Nāgārjuna has been enriched. Especially noteworthy is Etienne Lamotte's translation — from the Chinese version of the lost sanskrit original — of the Treatise which the Buddhist dialectician consecrated to the "Supreme Wisdom" (*Le Traite de la grande vertu de sagesse*, Louvain, 1948-49).

Buenos Aires, February 1968

CHAPTER ONE

EARLY BUDDHISM AND THE "LITTLE VEHICLE"

The four noble truths of suffering. — The twelve nidānas.—The "concentrations." — Initial negative attitude. — The indeterminate problems. — Eternalists and nihilists. — The Middle Path. — Impossibility of the unique cause. — Analysis of the causes and the conditions. — The "Void" and the "Summit of Wisdom."

Within the complex system presented by the buddhist texts, which are so contradictory that the words of Shakespeare may also apply to them ("The devil can cite the scripture for his own purpose"), there are only two doctrines which may, with some certainty, be attributed to the initial teachings of Śākyamuni. These are the doctrine of the four noble truths of suffering and the doctrine of the dependent origination of beings.

The first of these doctrines develops a theme which, in the tradition of Indian thought, constitutes a novelty in the vision of the world. In the texts Śākyamuni often declares that only he can explain what is suffering, what is the origin of suffering, what is the cessation of suffering, and what is the way which leads to the cessation of suffering. With

the help of a large variety of parables and images the texts denounce the existence of suffering, concerning which the vedic hymns and the ritualistic codification of the brahmanical works remain silent. Sentient beings suffer. Their suffering is a solitary one, for not even a mother can prevent her son from falling victim to the awesome trinity of sickness, old age and death. The world is a house on fire in which the inhabitants are trapped without knowing how to escape. The tears shed by men are more numerous than the drops of water in the four oceans. There does not exist a single place on earth which is free from the dust of bones. And the death of our son can be avoided only by procuring a grain of mustard from the person from among whose kin no one has died.

Still the Upaniṣads speak of the suffering of the world as well. Suffering is inherent in existence, although not in reality; consequently man seeks to free himself from the cycle of existences. The oldest Upaniṣads speak of life as a cyclic succession, an idea best illustrated by the "riddle" of "how can water acquire a human voice": that is, from the bodies burnt on the funeral pyre rise vapours which form clouds from which, in turn, water falls, converting itself into food which is then transformed into semen and gives birth to new life.[1] Thus the water of the cloud acquires a voice in the child. But the Upaniṣads also affirm the cyclical succession of existences with regard to the individual. The same man is born once and then once again. In such a cycle of existences man, according to the Upaniṣadic texts, feels "like a frog in a pool without water";[2] and his aspiration consists in

avoiding the pain of the series of births and deaths. For this the brahminical thinkers proposed the paths of knowledge, of works, of ecstatic contemplation, and, at times, the intimations of grace.

Like all the schools of that period, Buddhism offered a way by which suffering could be eliminated, because even for this new doctrine man is, within the cycle of existences, "like a fish out of water."[3] To this effect, Buddhism proposes the formula of the four noble truths, which is common to the distinctive Indian schools of thought of that time and of the subsequent periods, although each one of them gives to this formula a different content and meaning. "Suffering, the cause of [suffering ...], the elimination of suffering, the way which leads to the elimination of suffering" is a formula taken from medical science. The Buddhists were not unaware of this, since Buddha is often depicted in the texts as a physician, as "the best of physicians" and his doctrine as an incomparable medicine. In the Dialogues of Milinda,[4] the doctrine is a pharmacopoeia wherein it is possible to find all the antidotes and the elixir which guards against old age, sickness and death. Thus, as the medicaments put an end to diseases and physical pains, and prevent death, so does Nirvāṇa put an end to all ills, to all sufferings, and enables one to triumph over death. The system of Yoga[5] uses the same formula of medical science to show how liberation is obtained: transmigration, the cause of transmigration, the elimination of transmigration, and the path which leads to the elimination of transmigration. These four moments expressly correspond to the four sections into which medical science is

divided. Likewise, in the commentary on the first aphorism of the *Nyāya sūtras* — which guarantees the obtaining of the "supreme good" by means of the study of logic—Uddyotakara offers, although with certain variations in terminology, a formula which coincides with the former ones: that which must be given up or avoided, the cause of that which must be given up or avoided; the giving up, and the way which leads to the giving up. The commentaries on the first aphorism of the *Sāṃkhya-sūtras,* which state that the object of the inquiry is to avoid the three classes of suffering (i.e., those produced by an internal natural cause, those produced by an external natural cause and those produced by a supernatural cause), remind one of the medical science and compare the teachings of the system to it. They too offer formulas which are similar to the former ones.[6]

More original than the formula of the four noble truths is the doctrine of the dependent origination of beings, which, in an earlier stage, served to explain the cycle of the existences of man and subsequently was extended to refer to the entire world of phenomena. In its complete form, not counting the variations which the texts offer at times, the explanation indicates twelve moments, within the cycle of man's existences, each of which is determined by the one preceding and is a determinant of the one succeeding it. Man experiences old age, sickness, death (i) because all this is necessarily implied in birth, (ii) and this is specific to the impermanence of existence (iii) which is the lot of man; this existence is sustained because it receives nourishment (iv) which is demanded by

hunger and thirst (v) caused by sensation (vi) resulting from the contact (vii) of the six sense organs (viii) with objects; and these senses belong to our constitution of individuals endowed with a body and a name (ix) wherein acts a consciousness (x) which has sprung from the pre-dispositions (xi) from the deposits which, in our previous existence, ignorance has been forming and accumulating (xii). The distant root of our death lies in the ignorance of our former existence; and our new birth, after our death, shall have its root in the ignorance of our present existence. For the cycle of the existences to come to an end, it is necessary to destroy ignorance for with it the series which leads to a new birth and to a new death shall continue. Ignorance and the predispositions which it determines and the consciousness which emerges from these predispositions may be considered, in this series of twelve causes, as moments preceding our present existence. At times consciousness is represented as a seed which enters the material womb, without which the formation of the new individual being is not possible.[7] In the beliefs of an animist nature which Buddhism encountered in the non-Brahmanical milieux and adapted to its doctrine, this consciousness could be mistaken for or identified — and certainly it was — with the spirit called Gandharva[8] whose presence is also indispensable in order that the union of the two spouses not be barren. At the moment of death, this consciousness takes refuge in the tip of the heart and from there, like a man who uses a hanging rope to cross an abyss, passes on to the new body.[9] These are images which coincide with those found in the

Upaniṣadic texts, according to which, on the death of a man, the *ātman*, the substantial principle which Buddhism shall negate, leaves by the flaming tip of the heart and passes from one body to another, like a caterpillar which reaches the edge of a leaf and then balances itself in empty space till it reaches another leaf and abandons the first.[10]

In our present existence we must give up craving and thirst so as to be able to avoid a new birth which would condemn us to a new death. The destruction of thirst supposes, in turn, the destruction of our present ignorance. This present ignorance is none other than the ignorance of the doctrines of Buddhism, more specifically the ignorance of the four noble truths of suffering : because they do not know what suffering is, what the origin of suffering is, what its cessation is, and what the path which leads to its cessation is, men abandon themselves to the desire which will determine the new birth and they perform actions in accordance with which the new birth shall have specific, determined characteristics. But this ignorance of the four noble truths of suffering is also the ignorance of the series of twelve causes, considering that this series explains the origin of suffering. Knowing this series of the twelve causes, we will not be able to adhere to the impermanence of things, because this adhesion must necessarily determine a new suffering, since in the world, as in life, all that emerges is destined to perish ; and if we adhere to all that emerges, we shall have to separate ourselves from it. This ignorance is also the ignorance of the reality called *nirvāṇa* and which consists in the elimination of suffering. It is also the ignorance of the way which leads to the cessation of

suffering, the eight purities, which are in turn divided into three groups called the "aggregates" or components (*skandhas*) of the doctrine. These groups are : the group of virtue (*śīla*), consisting of right speech, right action, right conduct; the group of concentration (*samādhi*) which comprises right effort, right thinking, right meditation, and the group of wisdom (*prajñā*) consisting of right belief and right will.

Like all the schools of the period, early Buddhism is above all a method of salvation. This explains its marked pragmatic tone and its restriction of problems. All that does not lead to salvation will be rejected as superfluous. Moreover, Buddhism shall subsequently demonstrate the falsity of the conclusions to these useless problems offered by the other schools. Early Buddhism is not, nor does it want to be a system and it adopts an anti-speculative attitude. It prefers to resort to a technique of contemplation (*samādhi*) and to present an itinerary by which truth is "realised". In this sense early Buddhism was not inferior to any other Indian school. Being, like Yoga, essentially a method of concentration and ecstasy,[11] it recruited its first disciples[12] from among the "professionals of ecstasy." The perfection attained by this technique is afterwards used by the other schools, to the extent that it has been possible to see, in the whole of the Yoga of Patañjali and its commentaries, nothing more than a hinduised version of Buddhist yoga.[13] Śākyamuni is presented as an ascetic who is in perfect command of the technique of breathing. Seated with the feet crossed and the chest erect, Śākyamuni practised, especially during the rainy

season,[14] the control of the breathing, and thus he could devote himself to the practice of the "concentrations." These began as compound states in which intervene five elements (initial attention, *vitakka*; sustained attention, *vicāra*; pleasure, *piti*; joy, *sukha*; one-pointedness, *ekāggatā*) and then progressively became simplified. The first four concentrations called contemplations (*jhāna*, *dhyāna*), belong to the material and sense world. In the first contemplation, the ascetic still feels and thinks, but he has suppressed all laziness and torpor, all doubt, all aversion towards things, avoiding distractions and desires. The texts state that Śākyamuni attained this first contemplation in his adolescence, while watching over his family's cattle in the shade of the trees.[15] Without any preoccupations, without any anxiety, he had experienced, in that moment, a serenity which was beyond good and evil and which now appeared to be the start of the path to "full awakening." Recalling that moment, he also thought that this state could not be reached with the body exhausted by the privations which the ascetics imposed upon themselves and which he too had imposed upon himself. He resolved to nourish his body as he had during his adolescence. In this first contemplation dwells the intellectual attitude, but more in the form of representation[16] than of judgement. Objects do not cause voluntary phenomena, even when affectivity does subsist.

In the second contemplation the suppression of all thinking is attained. In it there is a sustained attention, while pleasure, joy and "one-pointedness" persist.

In the third contemplation the affective states of pleasure and joy cease to be and sustained attention is no longer necessary.

In the fourth contemplation breathing is suspended and the ascetic finds himself in a state devoid of any traces of hedonism, in a neutral state (*upekkhā*). With this contemplation ends the presence of sensible objects, including the mental objects, in so far as they are determinants on account of their "contact" with the mind, of the sixth group of sensations which Buddhist psychology considers to be in the same category as the five classical groups of Western tradition. Free now from the action of the objects, the ascetic is perfectly purified. He is like a man wrapped in a white mantle: he has ceased to be for the world, in him nothing can prevail.

When the fourth contemplation is fully achieved the ascetic acquires magic powers and attains profound knowledge. He can walk on the surface of water, pass through walls, rise in the air like a bird, experience the painful as pleasant and the pleasant as painful and he becomes immune to all suffering. He can project a "double" or multiply his body and create material substances. He can listen to the slightest and most distant sounds, be they present, past or future and he can converse with the gods. He can penetrate thought remote from to-day, from yesterday, from tomorrow. He can remember his previous forms of existence throughout the many formations and transformations of the worlds. He can see how beings appear and disappear, in accordance with their actions. The ascetic who has reached the fourth contemplation shall ascend to the

world of the gods and shall no more return to this world. In this world of the gods he will then attain Nirvāṇa.

However even this itinerary has four stages which can be equally overcome in the same way. In a fifth concentration, where already there is no contact with sensible objects, and which is far from all pleasure and pain, the ascetic intuits the empty and infinite space which is devoid of qualities. But his consciousness still has a determined object.

In a sixth concentration the ascetic attains to the intuition of the infinite consciousness, which is without objective determinations. After this, a seventh concentration eliminates this same infinite consciousness in order to surrender to the intuition of inexistence, to the "field of nothingness" (*ākiñcaññāyatana*). In an eighth concentration all the earlier states in which the intuitive function dwelt are superseded just as in the first four subsisted the functions of reasoning, of representation, of affectivity, which were subsequently eliminated. This eighth concentration is a state in which there is neither intuition nor no-intuition; in which there is neither consciousness nor no-consciousness (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*). The limit of all possible intuition has been reached. Thus just as in the fourth contemplation the ascetic could be described as someone who no longer exists for the world, likewise it can be said that in the eighth contemplation nothing exists for the ascetic. But this eighth concentration must also be superseded.

In the texts, the technique used to reach the seventh and the eighth moment of this itinerary is attributed to two ascetics who could have been the

masters or guides of Śākyamuni: Alāra who taught how to attain to the field of "nothingness," and Udraka who taught how to attain to the state of "neither consciousness nor no-consciousness." Considering that these states were still composite and destined to perish like all that is composite, Śākyamuni would have succeeded, abandoning the guidance of these masters, in reaching a state of absolute simplicity and purity which, from a physiological point of view, is a state of catalepsy. It is a state from which the ascetic comes out freed from the cycle of existences, since because he has reached this last concentration, the ultimate state, he shall be born again in any of the worlds. His present life is his last life. His death, when it comes will be the last one.

Thus, without great risk of error, one may attribute to Śākyamuni's preaching the exposition of the four noble truths of suffering and the doctrine of the twelve causes which explain the origin of beings. One must also attribute to it a negative attitude with regard to the teachings and practices upheld by the other contemporary schools. The Buddhist canon abounds with criticisms of differing doctrines and certainly goes as far as conceiving of possible doctrines (although such doctrines had no supporters), simply in order to refute them. One "discourse"[17] enumerates and analyses sixty-two doctrines against which early Buddhism fought. The canon refers to a large number of other ascetics and other practices, represented at times in a grotesque manner and condemned in strong terms. Moreover the texts present a classification of those questions which can be formulated in a

discussion, pointing out four types: questions which call for a categorical answer, questions which admit only replies which establish distinctions, questions which cannot be the object of an answer unless they are first clarified by means of another question, and questions which in no way admit of an answer.[18] The examples[19] serve at the same time to illustrate certain points of the doctrine: (1) will all beings die ? They will die. (2) Will all living beings be re-born ? Those living beings immersed in passion will be re-born; those living beings not immersed in passion will not be re-born. (3) Is man superior or inferior ? With respect to whom ? (4) Are the *skandhas* (the components of being) the same as the living being or are they different from it ? This is a question which must be discarded, because an entity called living being does not exist, just as there does not exist the son of the barren woman, concerning whom it is useless to ask whether he is black or white.

In general, there do exist questions which must be rejected because of the impossibility of an answer. In particular there are meaningless questions, "indeterminate questions" (*avyākrita-vastus*) which would have been pointed out by Buddha, considering as equally false all the solutions offered by the other contemporary trends. These meaningless problems are four in number: (1) Is the world eternal ? (2) Is the world finite ?[20] (3) Is the vital principle (*jīva*) the same as the body ? (4) Does he who has attained enlightenment exist after death ?

Buddha abstained from replying to these indeterminate questions; for the texts mention

several reasons for his doing so, the most important of which is the following: the solution given to these questions does not concern the religious life and they even distract the ascetic from the goal which he should pursue. The ascetic will die before he receives the answers to these questions just as a wounded man would die who, before being cured, would require answers to questions having nothing to do to his wound.[21] A famous parable[22] concludes with the statement, on the part of Buddha, that although he has learnt much, yet he has taught his disciples very little. He has taught them all that is useful: the truth about suffering, about the origin of suffering, about the destruction of suffering, about the way which leads to the destruction of suffering. He has not taught that which is not useful. Consequently, it cannot be said of him that he has adopted the attitude of those masters who keep their secrets in the "closed fist."[23] These last words are repeated a short while before his death,[24] as if to show his disciple, Ānanda, that he must not hope, as do the disciples of the other masters, for "the closed fist to open" and reveal new secrets of the doctrine. However, all this has not prevented the search, in the texts, for some indiscretion which would have made it possible to discover the solution given by Buddha to these indeterminate questions, especially the fourth one, which refers to existence or non-existence, after liberation, in Nirvāṇa.[25]

Nevertheless, in order to avoid false views, especially with regard to that which refers to the "indeterminate problems," at times the texts present them in such a way that it appears necessary to choose from four solutions: does the Tathāgata

exist after death ? Does the Tathāgata not exist after death ? Does the Tathāgata exist and not-exist after death ? Does the Tathāgata neither exist nor not-exist after death ?[26] Buddha rejects the answers to these *four* questions; as well this is the same procedure to which subsequent speculation shall have recourse, extending it to cover problems which had not originally been avoided in this way. This method was further generalised in such a manner that all the problems, including those for which early Buddhism thought it had encountered a solution, were declared to be without meaning. To save the contradiction, the theory of the double truth would be brought forth; according to which only the early, original teachings of a positive type would have any value for the common understanding, they were "mundane truths" which lost all their consistency when the "absolute truth" was reached, although he who reached it could continue believing "in them" as if they were still the truth.

Figuring among the more persistent and frequently contested doctrines, are two which appear in the early texts of Buddhism, under the denomination of "eternalist" (*śāśvatavāda*) and "nihilist" (*ucchedavāda*). The "eternalists" are those who maintain either that the world is eternal or that any entity subsists in a state of identity with itself, and they discover in reality an immutable permanence despite the fact that existences end only to give birth to new forms and that beings transmigrate. The "nihilists" are those who maintain that with the dissolution of the body, with the dispersion of the four elements, this being "which has

sprung from the mother and the father" is interrupted leaving nothing to continue after death.[27] These same denominations may be applied to those who hold that the Tathāgata exists after death or that the Tathāgata does not exist after death. Buddha preaches more against the nihilists than any other group, since their teachings, even if it were solely because of the negation of "eternalism," in which one could recognise Brahmanism and its doctrine of the ātman, lent itself to a nihilistic interpretation. Buddha is made to protest saying —" Mistaken, underhanded, false and unfounded are the accusations levelled at me by certain ascetics and brāhmins saying that Gotama the ascetic is a nihilist and preaches the annihilation, the destruction and the non-existence of the existant. This is what I am not, this is what I do not affirm. Today, as before, o monks, I proclaim only one thing; suffering, the elimination of suffering. ...[28] Nevertheless his doctrine could also be accused of being "eternalist,[29] since the destruction of suffering. Nirvāṇa, had on many occasions been presented in such a way as to admit of none other than the eternalist interpretation: in this nirvāṇa could be seen an immutable reality, an eternal refuge, and indeed thus it has often been called. If the Tathāgata "attained" this refuge, then it could be said that the Tathāgata did not annihilate himself in death, but rather that he experienced thereafter an eternal bliss. This implied the possibility of a return to the refuted doctrine of the eternal *ātman*, since the eternal bliss of those who entered *nirvāṇa* could not begin at a given moment, because all that begins must come to an end.[30] Independently of

what could have been the initial doctrine of Buddhism about the supposed entity which persists identical to itself through the transmigrations and which can be *recognised* in the diverse forms of existence, and independently of whether or not it was possible to impose a doctrine which only promised salvation to future beings whose existence did not have, with regard to the ascetic dedicated to the suppression of suffering, any more importance than that of a phantasm,[31] it is necessary to concede that the thought of those texts available till now is strikingly clear in its determination to condemn the extremes of eternalism and of nihilism, which are definitively the two usual forms of resolving the problem: Buddhism considering them mere opinions, would like to avoid them, and opts for a "middle way."

The middle way between these two rejected extremes is, for Buddhist thought, that offered by the doctrine of the "dependent origination," which, after presenting itself as a theory of the twelve causes to explain only the origin of beings and their subjection to *saṃsāra*, will be extended to include all phenomena, thus becoming a theory of causality. With regard to beings, the middle way which avoids the extremes of eternalism and of nihilism is indicated with these words: "How is it that there is no eternity? Because some are the *skandhas* (components) at the end of a life and others are the *skandhas* participating in the new life (and not that the *skandhas* of the end of a life are the same as those which participate in the new birth). The *skandhas* which figure at the end of a life remain interrupted. Then emerge the *skandhas* which take

part in a new life. For this reason there is no eternity. How is it that there is no annihilation? Because the *skandhas* which take part in a new life do not emerge when the *skandhas* of the end of a life have been interrupted, nor do they do so when the latter have not yet been interrupted. The *skandhas* of the end of a life are interrupted and at that very moment emerge the *skandhas* participants of the new birth. For this reason there is no annihilation.[32] Thus is formed the series of beings, without solutions of continuity which would enable one to speak of an annihilation and without the subsistence of elements which would permit speaking of eternity. This series is, according to the well-known example, like a flame which lit at dusk burns till morning, without being the same and without anyone being able to say it is another. The later texts[33] will say: "There is no destruction in the dependent origination." At the moment in which the cause — anterior — is destroyed, then the fruit — posterior — is born: one scale of the balance goes up, at the same time as comes down the other one. In this manner causes and fruits form a series, like a river." "Without permanence, without discontinuity. Without discontinuity, on account of the birth of the fruit; without permanence, on account of the destruction of the cause. Without permanence, without discontinuity: this is the principle of the dependent origination." *Saṃsāra* is a series in flux and in which every moment disappears only to be substituted by another in a sort of constant flashing subjected to laws. In this flashing there is no more reality than that of the ephemereal present, although this conditions the

future and is conditioned by the past, in accordance with those laws. There is neither a substance nor a plurality of substances. There are only momentary elements (*dharmas*) the appearance and disappearance of which will be explained by the doctrine of dependent origination, moments which succeed one another in a series which has had no beginning and which shall have no end unless it be with the obtaining of Nirvāṇa, for which it is necessary to know the four truths of suffering. The series which constitutes the cycle of the existences is painful, because it is impermanent. One may say that all these momentary *dharmas*, all these elements are painful. But there is one *dharma* which is not subject to conditions, which is not born and does not die; it is called *nirvāṇa*. This *nirvāṇa* means the destruction of suffering; and whoever attains it cannot be said that he *exists*, nor that he does not *exist*; nor that he *exists and does not exist*, nor that he *neither exists nor does not exist*. Like the conditioned *dharmas*, this other *dharma*, beyond the laws of dependent origination, lacks substance. All these *dharmas* shall finally be called empty, like space which is also an unconditioned *dharma*. Insubstantiality, impermanence, suffering, emptiness; these are the four great predicates of all the elements of existence. Insubstantiality and emptiness: these are the two great predicates of space and of the destruction of suffering.[34] The formula "everything is non-substantial (*anātman*), everything is impermanent (*anitya*), everything is painful (*duḥkha*), everything is empty (*śūnya*)" demands, in order to be comprehensible, this qualification.

Among the false opinions and views which

Buddhism fights, ranks the belief in the existence of a unique cause which determines the arising of the *dharmas*. Already the canonical texts ridiculed those who believed that the pleasure and the pain of beings should be attributed to the action of a supreme ruling entity. They asked whether to this supreme entity could be attributed the existence of evil as represented by crime and theft, adultery and falsehood, calumny and heresy, etc.[35] One passage goes so far as to attempt to explain how it is possible for someone to end up considering himself as the creator of the universe. When, after one of the cosmic periods[36] starts another, the first being to be reborn in the radiant world of Brahma finds himself alone and wishes that other beings could join him. Then appear other beings who had to appear there in accordance with their actions. The first one believes then that it has been enough to formulate his desire in order to see it fulfilled and considers himself creator of these new beings.[37] Concerned with the development of the doctrine of the dependent origination, subsequent speculation analyses the possibility of the existence of a unique cause and original first determinant of the appearance of the *dharmas* and concludes by condemning it as absurd. The first argument against this unique cause is the lack of uniformity in the world: if the cause is one and uniform, then its effect too must be one and uniform.[38] A unique cause should imply the simultaneity of its effects, yet we see things unfold themselves in temporal series.[39] If the succession of things is attributed to a succession which would be given in the unique cause, the cause would cease to be and would

become multiple. If to save this absurd notion it is recognised that there can be no multiplicity in its effects, which is false, as is demonstrated by experience. Let us call this unique cause "God," Īśvara[40] and let us admit that the multiplicity of the effect consists in a simultaneity of different desires of Īśvara. If it is a simple simultaneity of desires, the effects should also be simultaneous; yet the desires, in Īśvara, cannot but be simultaneous. It would be better to say that these desires, although simultaneous, are desires that things be born not simultaneously, but successively. To this argument one may reply with the affirmation that a desire of this unique cause cannot have, in the future, an effectiveness which it never had before, since it is a general principle that if something, at a determined moment, is not able to produce a determined effect, neither will it be able to produce this determined effect later, which would require new conditions, and this would be specifically contrary to the hypothesis of a unique cause. However, one may speak of secondary causes to which the unique cause would have recourse in order to produce, in a temporal series, that which by virtue of its own unitary nature it cannot produce, except simultaneously. This solution denies that the cause is "unique." Nevertheless, not being contemporary, these secondary causes would require an anterior cause which would explain them, and so on in succession, with

NOTE:—The word "eficiencia," although translated in this text as "efficiency," has, I think, more the meaning of efficacy or effectiveness in this context — that is dealing with cause and effect. In English "efficiency" has more the sense of doing something as smoothly as possible.

which one would fall into a *regressum ad infinitum*, which is the terror of Indian thought. Furthermore, this *regressum ad infinitum* is the negation of the unique cause.[41] Once the *regression ad infinitum* is admitted, the series of things would not have an origin; thus would be accepted the Buddhist doctrine of the impossibility of the unique cause. In other words, according to the Buddhist thinkers, to speak of auxiliary causes is to have a poor conception of Īśvara. What kind of Īśvara is this if, in order to cause a seed to sprout, he requires a new form of relation which is not the relation between himself and things? What we do establish is simply the action of these so-called secondary causes. We do not establish the action of a primary cause to which afterwards we must add, in order to explain the origin of things, the action of the secondary causes. By themselves, the "secondary" causes have enough effectiveness to produce the effect. And, if one were to insist on maintaining, at any cost, the existence of a unique cause, one would be compelled to declare that things are eternal, that things have not had a beginning, since the desire of creation cannot arise in one moment of the unique cause, as the unique cause has no moments. When this unique cause is admitted, it is pertinent to formulate yet another question: why has Īśvara made the world? For his own satisfaction? To this the Buddhist thinkers shall once again reply: What God is this God? In what consists his sovereignty, his being Īśvara, if in order to obtain satisfaction he requires means? And, lastly, they invoke the same argument which already figured in the earliest texts: does Īśvara derive satisfaction from the suffering of beings? Does Īśvara find

satisfaction in the knowledge that those beings which he created shall suffer all the tortures of hell, drowning themselves in a sea of filth which penetrates to the bones? This god would be a "devourer of flesh, of blood, of marrow,"[42] as those who maintain his existence would have, in fact, confessed.

The doctrine of the dependent origination was, in the earliest texts, only an explanation of the origin of beings and the cycle of existences. The series of twelve links (*nidānas*) taught that ignorance is the ultimate root of birth and death, and, in sum, of suffering. Again, by the application of the principle also mentioned in the earliest texts,[43] according to which "given that, this arises; not given that, this does not arise," this doctrine allowed for the cessation of suffering by means of the cessation of ignorance. But this doctrine concerning the origin of beings was subsequently transformed into a general doctrine of impermanent *dharmas*: that is, anything that is born, does so by virtue of causes and conditions. The determination of the multiple forms which this law of the dependent origination would take was of particular concern to the "little vehicle" (hīnayāna), one of the great currents into which Buddhism is divided. The distinctive schools coincide in their dedication to the analysis of the doctrine of the dependent origination and they do not differ much in their conclusions with respect to the forms which they discover in it or to the scope of the areas of objects in which each of these forms prevails. This analysis, carried out with scholastic fruition can be pursued in the *Abhidharmakośa*, the text[44] in which it is most extensively presented.

If something is, nothing can hinder its being. This "raison d'être" (*kāraṇahetu*) means that any one *dharma*[45] is determined by all the other *dharmas*, since a *dharma* cannot exist save when its possibility has not been centralised by the reality of the others. The "raison d'être" of a *dharma* must be first sought in the other *dharmas* and not in itself. Before its appearance no *dharma* is; and not being, it can in no way contain the reason for its future being. But this merely negative interpretation of the "raison d'être" deserves a cursory criticism: its over-generalization deprives it of all significance. What should be understood as "raison d'être," is that which, being able to impede the reality of something, does not impede it. On the contrary, a future object — which does not impede the reality of a past object — would also constitute the "raison d'être" of the past object. Without this restriction, the object (*dharma*) called "non being" would become the reason of the other objects, which is absurd. Once this is clarified, then it can certainly be said that nothing which contradicts reality can be given in it, and that no dharma enters reality without the concurrence of the latter. The "non-being" does not negate its concurrence, but neither is it able to negate it. Consequently, it does not constitute a reason of the being, not even in the widest sense which the doctrine of dependent origination presents in this form. (To seek the "raison d'être" of an object in the other objects does not imply any consequence of a moral order, although it would be possible to maintain the contrary upon observing, for example, that the reason of the object (*dharma*) called the "voluntary act" is completely contained in the reality. The consequence would be

legitimate were the reality not a mere "raison d'être," but an effective reason.)

The relationship which exists between co-existent objects permits one to establish a primary special form of reason, valid in those cases in which each of the objects finds its reason to be in the other. The relation between A and B is said to be one of mutual causality[46] (*sahabhuhetu*) when the presence of any of them implies the presence of the other and the absence of any of them implies the absence of the other. Thought (*citta*) cannot present itself to itself without content (*caitta*) and the latter cannot be given without the former. Substances cannot be given without qualities nor can the latter be given without the former. Three sticks sustain themselves upright by each leaning against the other two and at the same time offering support to the others. The presence of other causes or conditions (in this case the ground on which all the sticks rest) does not invalidate the affirmation of this form of causality or reason, since the validity of a determined form of relation must not be understood as being exclusive: combined, distinct forms of relation which coincide without displacing one another may and do intervene in the determination of a *dharma* or complex of *dharmas*.

The nexus established in time between two similar objects constitutes another form of causality. The possibility of this relation remains limited to the material series: a grain of wheat, in the moment t, is the cause of a grain of wheat in the moment t^1; a seed, in the moment t, is the cause of the sprout in the moment t^1. (We cannot anticipate the considera-tion of distinct moments of a single object without

falling into a substantialist conception of the objects.) This causal relation is irreversible; that is, only the past or present *dharma* can be the cause of the future *dharma* and the latter cannot be the cause of the former. The relation is called homogeneous cause, similar cause (*sabhāgahetu*) because a grain of rice at the moment *t* can be the cause, at the moment t^1 only of a grain of rice and not of a grain of wheat.

The example of the sticks in second form of causal relation implies the possibility that by cause is understood the support provided by the ground. This common point of support is in fact another cause, another form of *hetu*. We have the perception of the colour red and the judgment: "this is red." These two *dharmas* — perception and judgment — are associated in so far as they have a common point of support: the modification, the moment, of the series called "organ of vision." This relation which exists between the *associated dharmas* and their common point of support (*samprayuktahetu*) is valid also in the sphere of the coexistent objects, but it is easily distinguished from the reciprocal relation.

There are two other forms of causal relation, exclusive forms of the organic world. One of these causes, called the general or universal cause (*sarvatragahetu*), is the one which is observed in all those series which are existences subject to birth, to death, to transmigration. In these existences there are *dharmas* which determine passions. *dharmas* which *stain* the series and which specifically impede the attainment of the peace of nirvāṇa. This cause is called the general cause, because it applies to all the *dharmas* which determine the passions.[47] The sixth

and last form of causal relation also appears in the series, but it is not given in immediate moments: it can only occur among *dharmas* separated by other intermediate *dharmas* and it presupposes a "ripening" of the former. Thanks to this form of causality (*vipākahetu*, cause of ripening), the beings know the fruit of their previous actions, of their *Karman*. The reward which, as a result of an earlier dharma, is received at a given moment of the "series" is specific to this series and cannot be transferred to another, even when the schools of the "great vehicle" (*mahāyāna*) maintain the contrary, precisely since its conception of the saint (*bodhisattva*) implies the possibility that the reward, which a man should have received for his past actions, be voluntarily transferred to others in order to help them on the way to salvation.

These six forms of causal condition (*hetu-pratyaya*) constitute only one of the four forms of relation between the *dharmas*. Their analysis comes late for in early Buddhism one cannot distinguish special forms and the texts speak of a causal condition in general.[48] A second form of relation between the *dharmas* is the one known by the name of "immediately preceding following condition" (*samantarapratyaya*) and, like the three causes the action of which is possible only in the series, governs the temporal successions. A given moment of the series must yield before another moment of the series. The condition in terms of its being a homogeneous and immediate antecedent disappears when its sequence is given; and without this disappearance there would be no series. A knowledge yields to another knowledge, and the series called "knowledge"

consists of this repeated yielding. But besides this disappearance of the first *dharma* it is necessary that we have equality between the second and the first *dharma*. The grain of rice in the moment t is the equal and immediate condition of the grain of rice in the moment t^1: the grain of moment t disappears, and the grain of moment t^1 appears. But the grain of rice in the moment t and the grain of rice in the moment t^1 are equal. (When we say that a grain of rice is transferred from A to D, we want to say that the grain of rice disappears in A and that in B appears another grain of rice which also disappears, and thus successively. "A grain of rice is only a convenient name to designate the series 'grains of rice'.")[49] In early Buddhism, this form of conditionality was restricted to the "mental" series.

Any *dharma* can be the object of knowledge. This is a third form of conditionality, called objective condition (*ālaṃbanapratyaya*). The object of knowledge has the particularity of being always present, of not being able to be an object except in virtue of being actual ("The present subject apprehends a present object"). That which presents itself, at a given moment, as an object of knowledge does not lose its condition of object of knowledge: the object can at another given moment, present itself as an object of knowledge. Any *dharma*, existent or non-existent, is an object of knowledge.

The fourth form of conditionality appears to be confused with the simple "raison d'être" (*kāraṇahetu*) referred to earlier. We know that any *dharma* whatsoever, in so far as it is an object, is a condition of knowledge. But when the fact of knowledge is given, other contemporaneous *dharmas* are equally

given which also condition this knowledge in so far as, being able to prevent it (because they could present themselves as objects of knowledge, and they do not do so) they do not impede it. This condition pertains to all the *dharmas*, save that very *dharma* we call "knowledge". Because its scope is so wide, it is called the sovereign condition (*adhipatipratyaya*).

These are the forms of conditionality which analysis discovers in the general principle of the dependent origination. Nevertheless the principle does not hold except in a certain class of *dharmas*. Some *dharmas* are outside of the principle and arise without any other *dharma* conditioning them: these are the *dharmas* called "unconditioned" (*asaṃskṛta*). In the classification which presents seventy-five classes of *dharmas* three of these classes are unconditioned: space, and the two "destructions" (*nirodha*), the latter term referring to *nirvāṇa*. These unconditioned *dharmas* cannot condition either: space and the 'destructions" do not affect and are not affected. The entire foregoing analysis is relevant to the *dharmas* the existence or nature of which depends on other *dharmas*; that is, to the impermanent *dharmas*. Space and the "destructions" do not need to be explained by conditions foreign to themselves. This independence makes them eternal, without this eternity implying substantiality.

The canonical texts had already mentioned the "void," the "vacuity" and had spoken of the itinerary, thanks to which the ultimate possible concentration is obtained, as being nothing but a process by which, by means of successive abstractions, the ascetic reached the supreme vacuity.[50] Proceeding like "one

who eliminates the wrinkles off a hide by scraping it," the ascetic, without even the intuition of infinite space, without even the intuition of infinite consciousness, without even the intuition of inexistence, without even the intuition of the limit of intuition, stripped of everything, shall have to attain this inviolable state of supreme vacuity which will enable him to "realise the work" and free himself from the cycle of existences. All the previous concentrations, including the eighth, are compound states which must thereby be overcome because all that is composed is impermanent and cannot — since it is impermanent — be the redemption which the ascetic obtains. The anterior stages of the itinerary lead to supreme vacuity because they too are void; it is due precisely to their progressive vacuity that they are able to reach the supreme vacuity. Void are the first four stages in which the ascetic still finds himself in the realm of the sensible, and void are the realms of infinite space, of unlimited consciousness, of inexistence, and of the limit of all sensible intuition. Vacuity, *śūnyatā* is not a state in which the ascetic has simply made an abstraction of the world, nor is it a state of indetermination in which there is neither consciousness nor unconsciousness. This ulitimate vacuity must also be declared void for *śūnyatā* to be reached.

Śūnyatā becomes the central theme of an entire literature the texts of which bear the name of "Perfection of Wisdom" (prajñāpāramitā). Offering a tedious reading, and written in accordance with a formula which is mechanically applied to all matters, the texts evince an attitude opposed to that adopted by the earlier collections. Instead of discussing and

analysing the doctrine, they enunciate it. Furthermore its enunciated statements are characterised by deliberate paradox.

Although Buddhism has saved innumerable beings — so say the books of the "Prajñāpāramitā" — yet no being has been saved by Buddha, since for Buddha there are no beings and consequently it is said that Buddha has saved innumerable beings. The Bodhisattva accomplishes actions which determine consequences, but the Bodhisattva knows that there are no actions and no consequences, hence his great merit since he performs actions believing neither in the existence of the actions nor in the existence of the merit. The Tathāgata can be recognised by means of certain special signs. Nevertheless there are no special signs which make possible the recognition of the Tathāgata, since the Tathāgata has non-signs for signs. The master did not teach anything which could be considered as the "Perfection of Wisdom" and precisely because there is no "Perfection of Wisdom" it is said that there is "Perfection of Wisdom." What the Tathāgata taught is not what the Tathāgata taught, and for this reason it is said that the Tathāgata taught it. Thus, successively, the "Perfection of Wisdom" will maintain that he who reaches the first stage of concentration does not reach the first stage of concentration; that whoever has succeeded in discovering the truth, has not discovered any truth. By the same token he has reached the first stage of concentration and discovers the truth of the doctrine. The doctrine of the "Perfection of Wisdom" which was not taught by the Tathāgata, was taught by the Tathāgata as the non-doctrine of the "Perfection of Wisdom."

Subhūti, to whom the Blessed One expounds all this, finally answers the question which has been put to him in order to verify whether he has understood of what the teaching consists. "In truth, nothing has been taught by the Tathāgata," he says; and deeply moved, he bursts into tears. But in spite of the tears of Subhūti the text[51] takes delight in continuing with the contradictory affirmations. He would not be a Bodhisattva who believed that he has saved all beings, because there is nothing which could be called Bodhisattva. This is the doctrine. Furthermore, there will be no one in the future who would believe in this doctrine, because there is no doctrine and there are no beings. That is what the Tathāgata knows, what Subhūti has learnt. But the Tathāgata knows nothing. because there is nothing to know. And if there is a "Perfection of Wisdom," there is in it neither truth nor falsehood; for this reason the "Perfection of Wisdom" is incomparable and incomprehensible. One must not say then, that the doctrine of the Tathāgata consists in the suppression of suffering or of anything else.

Lastly the *Prajñāpāramitā* takes refuge in the concept already suggested in the ancient Buddhist texts: the concept of *Śūnyatā*, vacuity. All things are empty, affirm these new texts; but they tend to identify vacuity with inexistence (*abhava*) and preach a scandalous "nihilism." There is neither ignorance nor wisdom; there are no four noble truths: there is neither suffering, nor origin of suffering, nor cessation of suffering, nor a way which leads to the cessation of suffering; there is no nirvāṇa, no obtaining of nirvāṇa, nor non-obtaining of nirvāṇa. Everything is, by its very nature, empty,

inexistent. Thus does the text of the hundred and twenty thousand stanzas declare it; and thus is it declared by the text in which all of this wisdom, which is not wisdom and, for this reason, is wisdom, is summarised in a single letter. In the same way, all the texts of the "Perfection of Wisdom" attempt to affirm the non-existence of all beings, possible and impossible. These texts were read and re-read by the monks, in their search for the supreme wisdom, the perfect wisdom, the "Perfection" of wisdom. The master of the I Tsing had read a hundred times the eight classes of the Prajñāpāramitās and continued to read them.[52]

When the enumeration of beings has been exhausted or when it is believed to have been exhausted, the "Perfection of Wisdom" negates itself: "I do not see the being designated by the name of *Prajñāpāramitā.*" Neither does this being, this name, this method exist; and if they do not exist, they cannot be affirmed, just as before they could not be negated when they were expounded. We cannot affirm or deny reality with regard to that which does not exist. This is the obscure principle which is obscurely insinuated by the "Perfection of Wisdom" in its alternating play of "Thus it is, but it is not thus and, for this reason, it is thus; "Thus it is, but it is not thus and for this reason it is thus and is not thus; yet it is thus and for that reason, it is not thus ..." its secret seem to consist. Nevertheless those who maintain that India has no other text the meaning of which is so different from that which appears at first sight are probably correct. It would be rash to conclude that we find ourselves in the face of an aberration, a "pathological nihilism."[53]

The charge of "nihilist" could have been levelled at Arāda, the certainly imaginary master who taught his disciples, Śākyamuni among them, how to attain to the realm of the "nothingness"; or the accusation could have been made of the Cārvākas who, in spite of their rigorous ascetism, maintained that death was death and no more, a simple dissolution of elements. Such a charge could not be levelled at Buddhism which was preoccupied with pointing out and contesting doctrines which were "nihilist" in one aspect or another. Nevertheless, the existence of those texts, in which "vacuity" was exalted, whether by converting all reality into a "void" or by offering the refuge of an "empty" state as the only way to emigrate from the cycle of the existences, justified, in a way, this accusation.

The Buddhist schools called the "little vehicle" basing themselves on the doctrine of the dependent origination of all that is born, elaborated a whole system — or better still, various systems — which appeared to respond faithfully to the intention of the thought of Śākyamuni just as it appeared in the canon of the "ancients" who considered themselves to be the faithful upholders of the tradition. On the other hand the literature of the "Perfection of Wisdom" emphasised the attitude of Buddha with respect to meaningless questions and deliberately appeared, because of its indifference to logic, to be lacking in meaning. The concept of śūnyatā dissolved all reality and all systems, without constituting a criticism of the systems which continued to appear within Buddhism. This literature is not interested in the polemics with the doctrines foreign to Buddhism, which was a preoccupation of the "little vehicle."

Its expression is dogmatic and turns its attention more to the devotional than to the speculative aspect; its "paths" are, in fine, with regard to Buddha and the Doctrine, the negative and eminent paths. The critique of the "little vehicle" will be the work of Nāgārjuna, who will also take refuge in the concept of Śūnyatā, after submitting the analysis and the conclusions of those schools which pretended to interpret the thought of Buddha, to a dissolvent criticism which consisted in the application, to all problems, of the method of the four negations which was applied only to the problems declared from the start to be without meaning. "That is, that is not; that is and is not; that neither is nor is not." To these four possibilities, which are all the possibilities, Nāgārjuna will reply negatively, whatever the problem presented to him. But he does not, on account of this, downgrade logical rigorousness. On the contrary, he will pretend to arrive at these four negations — in the name of logic. In this way, he founds the intermediate school, which would tend to avoid the four heresies of "being," of "non-being," of "being and non-being," of "neither being nor non-being," pointed out by Buddha only in regard to a limited number of questions. Furthermore as he polemizes exclusively with those who claim to follow the doctrine of Śākyamuni, he could not escape being noticed by the defenders of Brahmanism, whom he influenced, without deliberately seeking to do so, to the point that Śaṅkara — the greatest of all philosophers — will end up being branded as a Buddhist in disguise.

CHAPTER TWO

NEGATION OF CAUSALITY, OF MOVEMENT, OF TIME, AND OF BEING

Nāgārjuna's critique of the notion of the origin of the *dharmas* and of the notion of movement. — Instantaneity of the *dharmas* change. Sarvāstivādins and Sautrāntikas. The "characteristics." Birth, duration, death. — Time. Inexistence of the past and of the future. The Present. Presence, reality and efficiency. Measure of time. Time, being and non-being.

Once the principle according to which the origin of the *dharmas* depends on causes and conditions is established, it is possible to ask where these causes and conditions should be sought. Within the same *dharma* the origin of which we are trying to explain? Outside of it? at the same time within it and outside of it? neither within it nor outside of it? The first of Nāgārjuna's propositions rejects all of these four cases: "Nothing is born by itself, nor by anything distinct from itself, not by itself and something distinct from itself, nor without cause."[1] In order not to limit the scope of this proposition it is immediately added that at no time, in no place, can anything be born. Any one of these four cases implies a

contradiction; and because they are contradictory Nāgārjuna will negate them.

Causes and conditions, if that is what they are, must be considered as being efficient for the production of effects. Now, this efficiency is either inherent or not inherent in the causes and conditions. In none of these two causes is the relation comprehensible. If efficiency is inherent in the cause, the problem will consist in the demonstration of the existence of the causes, since it is not possible to speak of the cow which belongs to the barren woman's son. If the efficiency is conceived of as not inherent in the causes, but as being independent of them, it will go against what has been affirmed in the principle according to which only certain *dharmas* — among which the efficiency of causes is absent — do not depend on causes and conditions. Even if the efficiency were inherent in the cause, there would be no possibility of explaining the cause, since the cause can only be understood and affirmed in function of its efficiency, and efficiency can only be understood and affirmed in function of its cause. How can any of these be affirmed and understood without reference to the other? There is no cause without efficiency, nor efficiency without cause: efficiency and cause are correlative terms, like right and left, and none of these can be affirmed without the other, which by the same token requires the former in order to be affirmed. If, in order to avoid this, the cause is defined in such a way that the concept of efficiency does not arise and it is stated simply that that is a cause upon which something depends and only to that extent this something already is, the difficulty is not overcome,

since even if to that extent this something is not, we shall come across the fact that the so-called causes are not causes considering that that *is not* which, depending upon them, would permit us to call them causes. In other words, if the cause is called cause in virtue of its having already produced an effect, before producing an effect it will not be a cause. To say that it is converted into a cause afterwards is to say nothing, since if this were the case one would have to explain the causes by which that which is not a cause is converted into a cause, and so the problem is not solved but rather reformulated.

Nevertheless, the problem can be confronted in more general terms; things are or are not. Let us suppose that something is not: if it is not, what purpose is there in speaking of causes and conditions which determine it? Are there perhaps causes which determine non-being? Let us suppose that something is: if it is, why do we need conditions, which cause it to be? Do we not say that it is? That which is, is without conditions; for this reason we say that it is; that which is not lacks conditions and for this reason also we say that it is not. Neither being nor non-being are explained in terms of causes and conditions. There are no explanations for that which is nor for that which is not, if we have recourse to the principle of reason. Nothing requires, whether in order to be or not to be, causes and conditions.

This is the general negation of the possibility of the causes and conditions, although a particularised negation of each one of them is also pertinent. The other Buddhist schools had to hold on to the

principle of the dependent origination of the *dharmas* since this was the necessary starting point for its conception of the world. If the affirmation that there are *dharmas* subject to causes and conditions were rejected, the entire system could collapse due to the confusion that would be immediately produced between the unconditioned *dharmas* and the conditioned *dharmas*. Furthermore, the distinction between these *dharmas* was indispensable in order to justify the four truths which, beginning by indicating what suffering was, ended up by indicating which was the path which led to the suppression of suffering and made possible the attainment of Nirvāṇa, reality which is not dependent on causes and conditions.

Once the criticism of the very principle of the dependent origination of the *dharmas* was made, it was unnecessary for Nāgārjuna and his disciples to proceed to the analysis of each one of its forms. However, by overemphasis, they could insist in the critique and demonstrate, by exhausting the analysis, the contradiction contained in each one of these forms. The analysis did not require new efforts; rather, it was a simple illustration.

The condition which is capable of producing the arising of something is called a causal condition (*hetupratyaya*). But if the *dharma* which is not as well as the *dharma* which is do not arise (the first because it is not, the second because it already is), how can there be a cause which is the agent of this apparition? We could speak of an efficient cause, if an object which could be produced were produced — says Candrakīrti, the late commentator of Nāgārjuna; but as neither being nor non-being can be produced,

what reason can justify the invocation of these causes? Being cannot appear, because it is not. The conditions capable of producing do not exist, because there exists nothing which can be produced. Furthermore, if anyone were to venture the opinion that the conditions capable of producing existed though they produced nothing, the response could be in accordance with the position taken by the school, that what is capable of producing something in a given moment does produce it in that given moment.[2] To maintain that something is the reason of something it is necessary to affirm beforehand the reason which still is not a reason. Thus is negated the first form of condition, called *hetu*.[3]

The three other conditions are negated in the same way. In the series formed by objects in time there would be a sequence without intermediaries (*samanantarapratyaya*). This sequence is equally impossible, because for a *dharma* to be born in the series it is necessary for the previous one to die; and a *dharma* which *is* cannot die, nor be born; still less can a *dharma* which can not die or be born. Even if we were to concede that the *dharmas* could continue being born in order to form this series, what would be the determining condition of its birth? The previous *dharma*? Yet, is it not said that for a grain of rice to be born in the moment t^1, it is necessary for a grain of rice to die in moment t, since only due to the death of a grain of rice in moment t can a grain of rice be given in the moment t^1? And if the grain of rice of moment t no longer exists, how can it be considered the condition of the grain of rice of moment t^1? How could one speak of a previous condition in time — which would not be condition nor could it be

so, for the simple reason that it no longer exists? When the second *dharma* appears, the first one no longer exists. Is there any purpose in speaking of a non-existent condition? Only in one case: if non-being is also considered to be a possible condition. Nevertheless, in this case it would be necessary to explain what the *disappearance of non-being* consists of, considering that in this form of relation it is only due to the disappearance of the condition that the conditioned is given.

The same argument is used to criticise the other form of condition: the objective (*ālambana pratyaya*). Is the determining object of sensation that of the sensation already given or of the sensation which is not yet given? In the first case it is not a condition, since the sensation is already given, and that which must be explained is not the given sensation but rather how the sensation arises. In the second case it is not a condition either, since non-being does not admit of conditions. The fourth condition (*adhipatipratyaya*) is as unnecessary as the previous ones. It can be interpreted in a general sense (which was mistaken, as we have seen, with the simple raison d'être), in accordance with the old formula: "This being given, that arises; this not being given, that does not arise." In this formula it is denied that the *dharmas* are by themselves, that they have their own nature. But being cannot present itself to us as something lacking in a self-nature, as subject to conditions the absence of which would annul it. If it is sustained that what is, is conditioned, then the reality which, by definition, being has, is denied. And if its reality is negated, what sense is there in speaking of its being?

How can the existence of relations among objects be maintained if the objects do not affirm themselves by themselves in order to make the relation understandable?

That which is dependent is not in that upon which it depends and thus it cannot emerge from that upon which it depends. And if it is in that upon which it depends, it does not need, in order to be, to emerge from that upon which it depends. This new venture consists in affirming that what is, is without having been before in the conditions which cause it to be. But it is not clear how that which is, depends on such or such condition and not on this or that other, or on no condition. Moreover, the conditions, if they were possible, would in their turn need to be affirmed in virtue of other conditions, which would land us in a regression *ad infinitum.* And if the conditions could be explained by themselves we would be confronted with this alternative: between the condition and the conditioned there either is identity or there is not. If there is identity, there is no possibility of distinguishing between the condition and the conditioned. If the product is already in the cause, it is not a product. If there is no identity, there is no possibility of establishing a relation between a determined conditioned and a determined condition: if the product is not in the cause, to say that it emerges from the cause is to say that it issues from where it is not; thus, it could arise from anywhere (if the curd is not in the milk, water should be able to give curd).[4]

It will be said that existence of the conditions and of the conditioned is demonstrated by the direct knowledge we have of them. Perception will enable

us to affirm "this is a condition," "this is a conditioned"; but if analysis discovers that these affirmations are absurd, we should renounce them. Can we apprehend the conditioned or the conditions independently and while they are conditioned and conditions, or do we only apprehend them conjointly? If we admit a distinction between the condition and the conditioned, in such a way that each one of them can be perceived or conceived as condition and as conditioned independently of the other, we will fall into the absurdity of admitting the perception or conception of a condition or of a conditioned which, in order to be considered as such, must be given in a relation. In the other case, if they are perceived or conceived jointly we shall find ourselves faced with the absurdity of considering two entities as a single one. To maintain that the conditioned is apprehended independently of the condition is to maintain that the conditioned which lacks condition does not exist. The conditioned and existent would lack condition; the conditioned and non-existent also would lack condition. In fine: there is no conditioned with condition; there is no conditioned without condition; there is no condition without conditioned. The admission of the conditions and the conditioned is only possible if these two are given together, since only the union makes them intelligible; but this union eliminates the distinction needed in order to speak of conditions and of conditioned. The identity of condition and of the conditioned is the impossibility as much of the condition as of the conditioned; the distinction between condition and conditioned is the impossibility of the condition as much as it is of the conditioned.[5]

To speak of a "modification," a "transformation" of the condition, is to transpose the problem, without resolving it, and to offer as an explanation precisely that which demands to be explained. Salt cannot cease being salty without ceasing to be salt; and if it has ceased being salt we will not be able to recognize in that which is not salt that which before was salt. In the same manner, to speak of salt as being able to cause something else to be salty, is to forget that what we find to be salty, in something else, is the salt itself; if its being salty is specific to salt, salt cannot cease being salty: it can do so neither by modification nor by transference, since its nature or what is specific to it (*svabhāva*) is inalienable.

Resorting to the combination of a distinct, concurrent combination in order to explain the relation does not alter the problem either. In this combination of conditions the conditioned is already given or else it is not given. If it is already given, why speak of its arising ? If it is not given, why is it that what determines its arising is this combination of conditions and not another ?[6] The previous argument still holds : that which is cannot follow from causes and conditions, because it is. That which is cannot follow either from what is nor from what is not and neither can what is not follow from what is not nor from what is. Conditions and non-conditions are confused if one tries to maintain the existence of conditions; the conditioned and the non-conditioned also get confused.[7] What explanation is this — that is, the doctrine of the dependent origination of the *dharmas* — if, instead of explaining it, it confuses it all ? The four conditions which

the Buddhism of the Hīnayāna undertook to analyse are not possible. Neither is possible the unique cause which would give us the explanation of all, as the analysis has already shown. Consequently all the possible explanations of the origin of the *dharmas* are eliminated.

Nevertheless if nothing can proceed from anything, or depend on anything, if nothing has its explanation in anything, how can the doctrine of *Karma* be saved ? This doctrine was necessary for the understanding of the moral system : the actions "ripen" until they bear their fruit, whether it be the fruit of salvation or not. Thanks to this doctrine, the Master could offer a therapy which could guarantee salvation. Without this therapy, the system was useless. For if the actions do not bear fruit, one can neither explain the cycle of existences, the "perfume" which the *dharmas* of our existence receive from previous actions, nor the general tendencies of the series of which our existence consists. To negate *Karma*, action, is to negate the very possibility of salvation and those who did negate it were strongly condemned by Śākyamuni.

Yet, Nāgārjuna does not restrain himself. The doctrine of action and the fruit of action can only be admitted if it does not imply a contradiction. If it implies a contradiction it is false and therefore cannot be the doctrine of the Master, unless in order to conceal one contradiction, it falls into another : that is, to attribute contradictions to the Master. The "Prajñāpāramitā" literature was there in order to show that what was predicated as action was non-action. And what are the contradictions which analysis discovers in the concept of "action" and of

"fruit of action"? Do we not find ourselves before a special case of the doctrine of dependent origination, the impossibility of which has been demonstrated ? The agent who really is, cannot realise an action which would really be, just as the agent who is not cannot realise an action which would not really be.[8] The fruit either already is or as yet is not: if it already is, what purpose is there in speaking of its production by actions ? If it is not, how is it going to be produced by actions ? The agent has the same reality as the non-existent agent. If that which really is cannot be produced, how will we recognize the agent capable of producing a fruit which really is.

Again we encounter the alternative that any analysis of the relations persists in denouncing. Either the repetition which consists in wishing to produce that which already is, drawing it out of the condition in which it already is; or the impossibility of wishing to produce that which is not, drawing it out of the condition in which it is not. Either tautology or absurdity : in the first case, the naive sāṁkhya doctrine; in the second, the arbitrary Vaiśeṣika doctrine. In both cases, the analysis will conclude by imposing on any judgment the penalty of either petition of principle or contradiction. For the time being, with respect to the relations which speak of conditioned origin, we encounter the following disjunctive proposition : either the oil is already in the olive, or the oil can be produced by the grain of sand; or the oil is already in the grain of sand or the oil cannot be produced by the olive. Either nothing arises or everything can arise out of nothing.

This disjunctive proposition would compel us to examine other concepts. Certain relations suppose an anteriority of the condition with regard to the conditioned; that is, certain relations suppose time. What meaning does time have, if these relations are not possible ? Can anteriority and posteriority be affirmed independently of the relations between the *dharmas* ? And if, in general, the relations are not possible, how should we understand the supposed relation between two judgments, one of which finds the reason of its truth in the other ? Are not past and present, conclusion and reason, offering us types of relation as absurd or useless as those discovered between the concepts of condition and of conditioned ? And if being cannot depend on causes and conditions, will there be any possibility of affirming any being, any *dharma*, independently of causes and conditions ? Is there any reality which affirms itself on its own ? Are there unconditioned *dharmas* ? Space, nirvāṇa, which do not have a dependent existence, *are* they, in reality ? And what can nirvāṇa mean if it has been said that actions capable of producing a fruit are not possible ? How would nirvāṇa be obtained, if it has already been said that the destruction of anything is not possible, in so far as the destruction is understood as the effect of causes and conditions, and if nirvāṇa is the destruction of suffering ? Is there an impermanence and can we free ourselves from this impermanence ? What meaning, in fine, does the doctrine of Śākyamuni, which speaks of all this, have ?

In spite of what is affirmed by experiences, this analysis believes that it finds contradiction or tautology in the affirmation of the existence of causal

relations between the *dharmas* and in the affirmation of the existence of the conditioned *dharmas*. Experience also affirms the reality of movement. But if the analysis shows, as in the previous case, contradiction or tautology, then the affirmation of movement must also be rejected.

For Nāgārjuna the movement[9] supposes itself by itself and its existence cannot be demonstrated without a petition of principle. Something is said to be mobile only because it has moved or because it will move. If it has not moved nor will it move, we cannot say that it moves. Without a previous or a future movement, movement is incomprehensible. And as long as, in order to explain movement, we refer to a previous or to a future movement, we shall refer to what we claim to explain. Movement will only be affirmed if we do not refer to the previous or to the future movement; but this attempt to affirm is impossible, because it would compel us to base movement on what is not movement.

Let us take the example of the trajectory travelled by a moving body. In the distance already covered, the past, is there movement in the moving body ? No. In the future distance, not yet covered, is there movement in the moving body ? Still less so. Therefore the movement can only be present movement. But the present movement is contradictory because it does not imply the moments which the movement implies. Movement can be conceived of only in the present, but in the present the movement is incomprehensible because it is contradictory.[10]

The movement of a moving body is incomprehensible : it is not possible to speak of movement,

and neither can we speak of a moving body independently of the movement. The moving body and movement are two concepts which cannot be affirmed either in a relation which unites them or without relation. The moving body is impossible, because for it to be possible it should move, and it cannot move. Movement is impossible, because for it to be movement it should be the movement of a moving body and the moving body is not possible without the movement. To conceive the moving body and the movement as independent, is absurd; to conceive them as dependent is equally absurd; none of them can be affirmed by themselves in order to subsequently make possible the relation. Neither can the relation be affirmed which makes possible the affirmation of the terms.

Wouldn't it be possible to attempt an explanation of movement in function of time ? The relations between present, past and future could perhaps serve to affirm this movement which has been declared absurd. But the attempt is puerile, since these three times must be understood as the three times of the moving body, and this is tantamount to affirming the moving body, that is, the *dharma* endowed with the movement which we would like to explain. And we would find ourselves in the same situation if we were to speak of the three times of movement. Consequently it is not possible to refer movement to the three times of a moving body which, in order to be conceived, require the prior affirmation of that which is being discussed.

To the great scandal of ordinary experience, this critique also does not admit of the affirmation of movement based on the fact that the movement

could begin or end, an abstraction derived from the difficulties in directly explaining movement itself. Movement cannot begin, because in the trajectory of the moving body only three intervals can be detected : the distance already covered, the distance not yet covered, and the distance that is being covered. The moving body has no other trajectory. Leaving aside the interval already covered — since we want to explain a movement which begins — there remain only the interval not yet covered and the one which is being covered. The beginning of the movement cannot be given in the interval still not covered, since it has been said that the moving body is only in the interval that is being covered. And in the interval that it is now covering there cannot be a beginning of movement either, since the moving body is in the process of covering it. It cannot be said that the movement begins and for the same reasons it could not be affirmed that the movement ends. The movement, if it is, is a present movement; and the present movement does not begin or end. Furthermore, present movement is contradictory.

The moving body cannot move. Neither can the non-moving body move. That which was moving and non-moving could not move either, on account of the two previous impossibilities. That which was neither moving nor non-moving still could not move, because there is nothing which is neither moving nor non-moving, and nothing can be posited of that which is not. There are no other possibilities besides these four. Consequently, nothing can move, although ordinary knowledge speaks of moving bodies and of movements.

Nevertheless, commonplace knowledge admits of many other things, in the same way in which movement is admitted.[11] It speaks of an origin, of a duration and of a disappearance of the conditioned *dharmas*. The same monks who believe they follow the teachings of Buddha speak of the origin, of the duration and of the disappearance of the *dharmas*, even when they come to recognise that there is no movement. Some monks of the "little vehicle" maintain that the conditioned *dharmas* could not exist "beyond the attainment of their being."[12] The conditioned *dharmas* would perish in the very place in which they are born; they could not transport themselves from this place to another. This destruction of the conditioned *dharmas* cannot have a cause—as some recognised—because if something is destroyed, this something is not and what is not (*abhāva*) does not need a cause which would explain it. What is born can only do so instantaneously. If the conditioned does not perish instantaneously, in the very moment in which it acquires its being, neither could it perish afterwards, because there would be no reason which would justify its perishing in another instant. What perishes — maintain these monks of the "little vehicle" — must perish the very moment it is born: for that reason, it lacks duration. The argument that the *dharmas* change does not hold, for it is absurd to maintain that something, without ceasing to be what it is, changes into something else. It is impossible to postulate that things change and that immediately after a series of changes, or due to certain circumstances, they perish, without having perished earlier. It is arbitrary to speak of the experience according to which that

which perishes, perishes due to certain causes and not of its own accord. Wood perishes, according to experience, when it is consumed by fire. Yet the monks of the little vehicle had already stated that all the so-called experience contains is the knowledge that, at a given moment, we do not see what we were seeing in the previous moment. Therefore it is a matter of inference, not one of perception. "The fact that, after its relation with fire, we do not see wood, lends itself to two interpretations: either the wood perishes in virtue of this relation, or else the wood incessantly perishes by itself and is ceaselessly reborn by itself in the normal relations, to stop renewing itself by virtue of its relation with the fire."[13] The wind that blows over a flame, the hand clasped around the clapper of a bell, impede, respectively, the renewal of the fire and the sound; but they do not destroy the flame and the sound. The destruction of things is spontaneous; things perish by themselves, because it is in their nature to perish, and as they perish by themselves they perish when being born.[14] Things do not endure; they are instantaneous (*kṣaṇika*). There is no movement in things; there is no change in them: there is the birth, in a new place, of a second moment of the series. A "grain of rice," transported from this village to another village far away, passing through all the places in between, reproduces itself, without discontinuity, in the intermediate places. For this reason, when the possible relations between the *dharmas* were studied, it was found that the series "grain of rice" was constituted of as many objects as there are moments in the series, and not of one single object which would present itself in distinct

moments of time. All this would be valid, according to the schools of the little vehicle, for the conditioned *dharmas*, since by conditioned *dharma* is understood that which has the three characteristics of origin, duration and death. Nevertheless a complex discussion had already arisen in Buddhism refuting these concepts of origin, duration and death as being the characteristics (*lakṣaṇas*) of the *dharmas*.

To be born, to endure, to die are either *dharmas* or they are not *dharmas*. If they are not *dharmas*, one cannot speak of their birth, their duration, their death. If they are *dharmas*, they are either conditioned or unconditioned. If they are conditioned they will have, in their turn, the characteristics of birth, of duration and of death. Let us analyse this last possibility. Being conditioned *dharmas*, and having in their turn the characteristics of any conditioned *dharma*, they would impose on us a regression *ad infinitum*, because again the characteristics of these conditioned *dharmas* will have birth, duration and death. Furthermore, the regression *ad infinitum* eliminates the origin of the conditioned *dharmas*, and this origin was what needed to be affirmed. To get around this difficulty and allow the affirmation of the characteristics of any conditioned *dharma*, the Sautrantikas countered by saying that this analysis which presents characteristics which in their turn require characteristics is arbitrary, since what is being referred to are objects which cannot be analysed, like "space." Birth, duration and death — they said — are not in themselves entities to which it is proper to attribute characteristics which would be characteristics of second rank

(*anulakṣaṇas*). The traditional doctrine, interpreted according to its spirit and not simply its letter, would point out that birth is not something distinct from the object itself: we say *the birth of*, but the genitive is a manner of speaking; by *birth of something* we must understand *something which is born*: the rising of smoke is not something distinct from the smoke itself. The Sarvāstivādins replied by saying that if the conditioned *dharmas* are born without the birth having its own reality, without there being an entity called birth, the unconditioned *dharmas* — which, by definition, are not born — should also be able to be born, since the necessity of this entity called birth does not hold for them either. The Sautrāntikas insist: what is the meaning of saying *the conditioned dharmas are born*? It means: that, not having been, they are. Nevertheless the unconditioned are, having been, and for this reason it is said of them that they do not have the characteristics of birth, duration and death. On the other hand, the Sarvāstivādins insist on the conception of birth as an entity the presence or absence of which serves to distinguish the conditioned from the unconditioned. The Sautrāntikas then develop a nominalist system in which the very admission of an entity called "birth" is as superfluous as the admission of entities called "lines of ants," "succession of thoughts," which are distinct from the ants and from the thoughts. Birth, line, succession are "mere sounds to which a meaning is agreed upon for convenience."[14]

Nāgārjuna goes further than the nominalists and will resolutely negate not only that one can speak of the characteristics as entities, but also that one

can speak of objects with characteristics — although existence is withdrawn from the characteristics in order to convert them into a given moment of the object. For the time being, we can again take up the argument according to which the characteristics do not exist.[15] If they existed, they would be conditioned or unconditioned *dharmas*. If they are conditioned, they have in their turn the three characteristics; and if they are unconditioned they cannot be characteristics of the conditioned, because if they were so, we would find ourselves before the absurdity of conditioned *dharmas* which turn out to be eternal (by characterizing them as the unconditioned) and of eternity characterizing that which is not eternal. In the first case (if they are conditioned) one would fall, as we know, into a regression *ad infinitum*, which negates the origin to be affirmed; in the second case (if they are unconditioned) the consequences turn out to be much more serious. Let us take the example of the third characteristic : death. It is impossible to conceive of death without a previous origin and duration. In order to be unconditioned, death would have to be conceived of without these. If in spite of everything we undertake to conceive of it as unconditioned, we shall conclude that death, because of its being eternal, is similar to nirvāṇa and space, where there is no death. If it were not similar, it would have to be space or nirvāṇa itself, which for the same reason, is absurd.

Analysing the problem from another point of view Nāgārjuna will say : "Are the characteristics separated or united ? If they are separated, they cannot be the characteristics of a *dharma* ; and if they are united, one falls into the absurdity of

conceiving the origin, the duration and the death of things — contradictory two by two — at the same time and in the same place."

A purely verbal solution shall posit that the origin is the origin of itself, at the same time as it is the origin of the *dharma*, without requiring an external origin which implies the dreaded regression *ad infinitum*. The origin is valuable as an explanation of the conditioned and of itself, like the light which illumines things and illumines itself. Nevertheless this latter example (which will be resumed when the problem of the possibility of knowledge is posed) is evidently inadequate. Light cannot illumine things, nor illumine itself, because where there is light there is nothing in darkness; only that which is in darkness can be said to be illumined, which is also absurd. Light and darkness cannot exist at the same time and in the same place; and the light being able to illumine itself from a distance — the only way to avoid a contradiction — there would be no way of explaining why light does not dissipate all the darkness of the world.[16] What difference is there between this darkness and the other, so that the so-called light that arises illumines this darkness and not the other ? If light illuminates, it illuminates eternally, without encountering darkness; and if darkness cannot be dissipated, it darkens everything eternally. Light has no origin, because nothing cannot have an origin. Although it is said that what originates has its origin in itself, we will encounter that infinite succession of origins within that which originates, with which the origin that was meant to be demonstrated is negated. Although the situation posed by the problem of the

three characteristics appears to be new, we are back to the same problem of movement, discussed earlier. To attribute an origin to that which originates is to declare that what originates does not have an origin in itself. If it lacks an origin in itself the result will be that what is specific to that which originates is not movement, but quiescence.[17] Furthermore, it has an origin in itself, it does have an origin either on account of the regression *ad infinitum*, and its nature would also be a quiescence. The final absurdity : that which has an origin is immutable.

Shall we entrust the problem, as before, to the solution which the concept of time can give to it ? Future and past things do not exist, and as a result do not have an origin, since it would be absurd to attribute an origin to that which does not exist. Neither does that which exists originate, because of that which exists we cannot say, without contradiction, that it originates. If we could say of the future and the past that "they originate" we would convert them into present things; being present, they *are*, and if they are, we cannot say that they originate. That which exists cannot originate, because it exists. That which does not exist cannot originate, precisely because it does not exist. Neither does what exists and does not exist at the same time originate, because there is nothing which exists and does not exist at the same time. That which, at the same time, neither exists nor does not exist, does not originate, either, for the same reason. Consequently,[18] "if what exists does not originate, nor does that which does not exist, nor that which exists and does not exist, nor that which neither exists nor does not exist, how can there be an originating condition?"

The same analysis will be repeated with the notions of duration and death. When can something be extinguished ? When it exists ? Evidently not. When it does not exist ? Again, evidently not. And when shall it be extinguished, if it is not extinguished when it exists, nor when it does not exist ?

The origin, duration, and death of things, affirmed by superficial knowledge (samvritti) prove to be illusory in the light of transcendental knowledge (*paramārtha*). They have no more reality than a mirage, than the horns of a hare. Those who believe they witness the birth of things witness the childbirth of the barren woman. Those who believe they contemplate the duration of things contemplate the life of the barren woman's son. Those who weep over the death of things weep over the death of the barren woman's son. All this is what Nāgārjuna could have said, by using the simile which was so dear to him. The disciples of Buddha will not be afraid of the triad of birth, old age and death, because there is no birth, no old age and no death. Birth cannot be without old age and death, because all that is born perishes, according to what a few disciples think they teach. If birth, old age and death are said to be separated, we would have a birth without old age and without death, and this cannot be, because birth is not conceived without old age and death. But neither is birth conceived of together with old age and death : if it is conceived in this manner, there is no birth, because everything dies, considering that birth and death are joined. Nothing can be said to be born, to grow old, to die. There is neither movement nor change in things. It is impossible to be born, it is impossible to die, it is

impossible to live without being born and dying, and it is impossible to live if there is birth and death. Saṃsāra, the cycle of existences, of births, of sufferings and of deaths, is illusory "like the flowers in the sky"; the cities of the world are as deserted as the cities of the Gandharvas. Birth implies death and death implies birth. Nevertheless, birth cannot imply death, because if it did so, it would not be birth, and death cannot imply birth, because if it did so, it would not be death. However, neither can birth refrain from implying death, because if it did so, it would be eternal; and if it is eternal, how can it be said that it is birth ? Whether or not things are born, there is neither life nor death of things. Whether or not things are born, there is neither birth nor life of things. And if things are not contained within the limits of birth and death, it cannot be said that things have impermanence, evanescence: it cannot be said that there are conditioned *dharmas*.

A vedic hymn[20] sings of time as "the most exalted of forces," as the "generator of heaven and earth." All beings are in time, the father of beings who ends up being the son of the beings. The Upaniṣads condemn this conception : Brahma cannot be in time : he is intemporal, prior to the birth of things, and it is only in terms of the movement of things — of the spheres — that the reality of time can be affirmed.[21]

The Nyāya system declares that it is impossible to affirm Time directly, as do the Upaniṣads which conceive of it in terms of the movement of the spheres or establish its unity subsequent to the affirmation of each of its movements — past, present, future. For the Naiyāyikas and the Vaiśeṣikas time

is a substance; they do not, however, admit of a direct, isolated perception of time, except the perception of the present duration which accompanies every perception and which is like one more quality added to the sensible qualities of objects, whatever be the organ affected by these sensible qualities. For the Vaiśeṣikas time ends up by being transformed into a spherical substance, considering that sphericity (*parimaṇḍala*) is specific to the infinitely large (time, ether — *ākāśa* —, space — diś —, *ātman*) and of the infinitely small (atoms). To be of infinite sphericity is to be eternal, since infinite sphericity cannot be a product, it cannot have an origin.[22]

Although Buddhist philosophy grants a certain privilege to the problem of space (*ākāśa*)[23] — which appears as an unconditioned with the same title as nirvāṇa — the disciples of Śākyamuni may claim the merit of having posed the problem of time with all its complications. The Buddhists reached the conclusion of the negation of time and compelled even the philosophers of the brahminical tradition (for example, Śaṅkara) to forget the primitive realist conception. Earlier one school made time the nucleus of its doctrine: conceived of as the ultimate determining reality of all things, as the unique cause to which every explanation had to be referred. The Sarvāstivādins, another Buddhist sect, maintained the substantiality of time, and the reality of its three moments — past, present and future — in a polemic which some "scholastic" texts[24] illustrate with great profusion.

Nevertheless, could Buddhism affirm the real existence of time and of its three moments — past, present, future — without contradicting the thesis

of the impermanence and of the instantaneousness of the *dharmas* ? The Sarvāstivādins did not hesitate to state that time could be unconditioned, like space and nirvāṇa : a *dharma* not subjected to origin, duration and death, not dependent on causes and conditions, eternal, unable to be affected. Only by affirming that time was an unconditioned could it be declared to be without origin. Unconditioned or conditioned, its conception raised serious problems.

If any knowledge supposes an object — as the realism of the Sarvāstivādins would have it — then to have knowledge of time, of the past, of the present, of the future, meant to have knowledge of the existence of time and of its moments, except that this opens up the possibility of a knowledge without object, which would be in contradiction to what the study of the objective condition (*ālambanapratyaya*) demonstrated. The nominalists (Sautrāntikas) gave the easy reply : any knowledge has, in fact, an object to which it refers. But what is the nature of the object in so far as it is object of knowledge, in so far as it is an object related to knowledge? Is the object the cause which produces the knowledge, its raison d'être, its *hetupratyaya*, or is it merely an object to which knowledge refers (*ālambanapratyaya*)? The first interpretation is false, since if it is admitted, then we must equally admit that the future and the past are also the cause of the knowledge, since they appear as objects of this knowledge. And how can it be said that the future — the inexistent future object — is the cause of a knowledge? To maintain that the object of knowledge must exist, must be real, is to confuse the objective with the real. To maintain, in order to

avoid the same difficulty, that what does not exist cannot be the object of knowledge is to ignore the nature of memory and of foresight. Memory is not knowledge of what exists but rather that of what has existed. Foresight is not a knowledge of what exists, but of what shall exist. The objects of memory and of foresight are not real objects. Might not the past object subsist, although in another way ? Those who maintain this latter view are the ones who opt for the atomic view of reality: by organizing itself in a distinct form, the past object subsists and can be known, and this knowledge is the knowledge of a real object. But the argument lacks cogency, because the knowledge which provides the memory of the past object is not the knowledge of the past object in its present organization but rather in its prior organization: it is a matter of another, still inexistent, object. And this is so, independently of the criticisms which the atomic view provokes in every Buddhist. "If the atoms touch each other in their totality, the things (*dravya*), that is, the distinctive atoms, would mix; that is, they would all occupy only one place; if the atoms touched each other at one spot, they would then have parts (*avayava*), and atoms do not have parts."[25] The atomic interpretation of reality is contrary to Buddhism, because the atom, eternal, invariable, would permit neither the creation nor the destruction of anything: if there are atoms there are neither actions, nor fruit, nor suffering, nor the cessation of suffering. But even if we admit the atomic explanation — say the Sautrāntikas — and if we admit also that the knowledge of a past atomic object is knowledge of an existent object, those

objects the structure of which cannot be considered atomic will be left out. Finally, if the past and the future objects are eternal, because of their being always existent (at any moment they can be objects of knowledge, considering that the condition of object of knowledge, as analysis shows, is never lost). One must then conclude, in order not to fall into this absurdity, that knowledge also has inexistent objects for objects. The ultimate proof of this lies in the negative judgment: if we negate something, we do have knowledge of its non-existence. If we admit that any object of knowledge, by the mere fact of being an object of knowledge, is real, we would fall into the confusion of considering everything as real. No discussion, no doubt, no problem would then have meaning. If the past objects exist, then the past organs of their apprehension also would exist. If the future objects exist, then the future organs of their apprehension also would exist. The past eye would see the past object and the future eye would see the future object, with the result that we would have three simultaneous visions. If we do not accept this conclusion reached by the affirmation of the existence of the past and the future, we shall have to deny that the present organ apprehends the present object.

The Buddhist theory affirms that actions produce their fruit, although not immediately. For the cause of retribution to be effectively a cause, the realists reply it is necessary for it to exist, although it be past. If not, how to explain that past action bears its fruit in the present ? In agreement with the traditional doctrine it can be maintained that there exist the present *dharmas* and a few past and future

dharmas: the past *dharmas* the fruit of which has not yet appeared and the future *dharmas* the appearance of whose fruit is inevitably determined.[26] But the nominalists shall say — precisely in virtue of the fact that the fruit is not born from the past *dharma* — that those who affirm the existence of the past and of the future by considering them as things (*dravyas*) must also admit the eternity of the fruit, considering that the continuity of the cause must determine a continuous fruit.

The problem of time cannot be definitively resolved, without recourse to other notions which are associated with it and which must share its fate. Experience shows a change which appears to be a change of the things, and basing ourselves on it, we speak of distinctive moments — past, present, future — of things. But do things possess an invariable essence which allows us to recognize them in spite of that which varies in them? The Buddhist cannot accept this explanation which corresponds to the Sāṁkhya school that had been criticised on so many occasions to say that, between milk and curd, there is nothing but a change of certain properties, that between the grain of rice in moment t and the grain of rice in moment t[1] there is, despite the "change," the subsistence of something which does not change, is to abandon Buddhism and fall into the theory of transformation (*pariṇāma*).

The present is converted into the past, the future is converted into the present in order to then convert itself subsequently into the past. If the future has been converted into the present, it shall have to convert itself, since it already exists, again into the present, and to repeat this conversion indefinitely,

The present which converts itself into the past shall also have to convert itself again and again, indefinitely, into the past and the true series shall be thus reversible and repeatable.

The present is converted into the past, the future is converted into the present and then into the past. But of what does this conversion consist ? The present is an object — the realists will say — with a determined characteristic (*lakṣaṇa*), and that which changes in the object is this characteristic; but the change must not lead us to believe that the new characteristic of the *dharma* was in no way in it before. For example, the future has the characteristic of the future. Nevertheless, it also has the characteristic of the past and of the present, and, consequently it can appear with the characteristic of the present and of the past. But this interpretation confuses everything, since to every moment in time are attributed the characteristics of the three moments. It shall be said that "cloth" and "whiteness" can coexist and that the disappearance of the condition of "whiteness" does not imply the disappearance of the condition of "cloth." But if this condition "cloth" or any other, subsists and is permanent, it will be mistaken for nirvāṇa, since its subsistence in just two moments would be sufficient to assure it eternity, considering that the *dharmas* are instantaneous, or are not instantaneous, without it being possible for them to take a third form of being.

Would it not be possible to affirm the reality of the distinctive moments of time by means of the relations that we establish between them ? It will be said that "a *dharma* is future with regard to another, if the latter be past or present; that a *dharma* is present with

regard to another anterior one (past) or a posterior one (future); that it is past with regard to the following one, be the latter present or future." This is a new confusion, made worse by the lack of precision of the formula, since a past moment would be present with regard to the preceding one and to the succeeding one and would be, moreover, future or past, giving rise simultaneously to the three times.

Another explanation, more organic and more consistent with the Buddhist spirit and with the general tendency of Indian thought, shall venture to say that perhaps the three times can be affirmed if the action of each one of them be analysed. The present is what an action realises. The sign of reality — and reality is tantamount to presence — is its efficiency. That which acts, exists; that which exists, acts. To negate the same unconditioned ones, the conception of reality as effectiveness must be an argument often remembered, and not only by the nominalists. (The existence of the unconditioned — Hiuan Tsang shall note later[27] — is proved neither by the evidence of the senses nor by inference which enables us to pass from activity to existence.) What would change in the *dharmas*, causing us to consider them as present, past or future, is their activity. In accordance with the function which they discharge, we call them present, past, future. "When a *dharma* finds itself in such a condition as does not enable it to accomplish its function, it is called future; when it accomplishes it, it is called present; when, having fulfilled it, it stops accomplishing it, it is called past. But the substance (*dravya*) is the same." This difference of function — the

actuality or non-actuality of the function — enables one to distinguish what is present from what is not present. For this reason it is possible to say that the object of knowledge, as an object of knowledge (*ālambanapratyaya*), is always present, even when it refers to a past object if one takes into account the other forms of relation in which it could present itself. This seems to be the doctrine most in harmony with the Buddhist teaching, for if the sign of the present is efficiency, the sign of the past and of the future must also be sought for in efficiency, because they are past and future notions which we need to explain in such a way that they can be understood as being of the same nature as the present to constitute with the latter the reality of time.

The Sautrāntikas need to go beyond this doctrine which purports to save the past and the future by granting them a greater reality than that of a mere name. They do not directly discuss the reality of time. They do so when it is claimed that time implies three distinct moments all of which would have a reality which actually is presence. But if we have recourse to the synonymy reality-efficiency it would perhaps be impossible to affirm even the reality of the present. Reality and past are contradictory expressions, as are the expressions reality and future. What happens with the notions of reality and presence? Does the eye which, at this moment, does not see, not exist? The function of the eye is to see, and in this consists its effectiveness, in so far as it is an eye — thus runs the argument. If it does not see, it does not fulfil its function; consequently, the closed eye — which, having fulfilled

its function, now does not do so — is a fact which is past and not present. Nevertheless, analysis has shown that the same object can be a condition in distinctive forms. To conclude that an object is not present, it is not sufficient that this object does not fulfil a determined function, that it does not act like a determined condition. The eye which does not see does not fulfil its function of seeing, but it acts in so far as it is the immediate and similar cause (*samānantarapratyaya*) of the following object in the series to which it belongs. Nevertheless, it is possible to discover the falsity of this last argument which seeks to prove the reality of something by basing itself on the intervention of this something in whatever sort of relation. Do the past *dharmas* act as the cause of retribution? Then the synonymy reality-efficiency shall oblige us to recognize reality, which is presence, in the past *dharmas* and, as a result, we will no longer know what we are talking about.

The discussion between the schools of the little vehicle does not end here. It insists that one could know what it is about if one specified how efficiency is to be understood, that is, considered as a synonym of reality and presence. The absurdity of considering the past as present would be avoided by saying that a *dharma* is real when, in addition to being the cause of retribution, it is the cause, as the immediate antecedent, of the moment which immediately follows in the series: the moment t^1 is real, because we immediately have the moment t^2, of which t^1 is the immediate cause. The moment t, although efficient because it is the cause of the retribution of t^2, is not real when we have the latter.

The Sautrāntikas insist that these distinctions complicate the discussion without making it clearer. When one has tried to clarify the concept of reality in terms of efficiency, one has slipped into the absurdity of affirming a difference between past *dharmas*: past *dharmas* which are present (efficient) and past *dharmas* which are not present (inefficient, or efficient in one sense and not in an other). The consequence would always be the impossibility of affirming time if one claims that the reality of time is the reality of the present and the reality of the past and of the future. Any attempt to distinguish the present, the past and the future, if they are taken to be real, will necessarily lead to the confusion of the past, the present and the future. To fall into this confusion also means falling into the affirmation of the eternity of the objects. As the *dharmas* capable of an action are eternal, they should forever carry out that action. Furthermore. it cannot be said that the action of these *dharmas* depends on other causes and conditions, since these causes and conditions — which are *dharmas* — would also exist always and would constantly intervene.

The Sautrāntikas further state that these are not the only absurdities into which this realist interpretation of time falls. We affirm a past activity and activity cannot be past, because if activity is past, the active *dharma* has to be past, and if it is past then activity cannot be attributed to it. Is it possible to avoid this absurdity by saying that efficiency must be understood independently of time, as being neither past, nor present, nor future? This is an equally absurd hypothesis, since activity, being non-temporal, removed from the past, the present,

the future, would be unconditioned. It is not possible to conceive of the efficiency of the past *dharmas*; and if it is not possible to conceive of this efficiency it is impossible to conceive of its reality. However, it was claimed that reality should be conceived of in relation to efficiency. To say that the *dharma* and its efficiency are one and the same thing, without one being the attribute of the other, does not change the problem; the *dharma* exists in the three moments, thus the efficiency must exist in the three moments. If it exists in the three moments, with what authorization do we call it past, present and future? We could call it present, past, future according to whether the *dharma* (a) was (b) was not, having been, and (c) was not, not having been. But then *dharma* and time are confused: *dharma* is time itself; time is *dharma* itself. Apart from the latter, how can one conceive of a *dharma* *not being*, *not having been*. In what consists its non-being, for us to qualify it as future, if the barren woman's son too *is not, not having been?* How will we distinguish that which is not and has not been but which nevertheless, will be, from that which is not, nor has been nor shall be.

Resuming the at times giddy debate, the Sautrāntikas affirm that the thesis of the reality of time and of its three moments — apparently necessary in order to explain the always distinct reality of the *dharmas* — compels one to admit the eternity of objects and to negate the always distinctive reality which one sought to explain. To say that the *dharmas* exist in the past and in the future, or to say that the past and the future (*dharmas*) exist, and to say that the *dharmas* cannot be eternal,

is a contradiction. And contradictions can be imposed (they are decrees, "the facts of the prince"[28]) but not demonstrated. To say that they exist although not with the existence of the present, is meaningless, since existence is synonymous with presence. To say that they exist "with the nature of the past and the present," and that the nature of the past and of the present always exists, constrains one to ask : if this nature of the past or of the future exists, why is it the nature of the past or of the future and not of the present? Conclusion : time cannot be conceived of independently of the *dharmas*, because time would be proved in terms of the efficiency of the *dharmas*; and if it cannot be conceived of independently of the *dharmas* it cannot be real in so far as it is past and future because neither the past *dharmas* nor the future *dharmas* are real. The only reality is the present; the only reality is the present *dharma*.

The Sautrāntika system exempts one reality: that of the present. Never does the discussion hint at the possibility of negating it, even when, at times, the reasoning threatens this last refuge of time. A more rigorous discussion would have taken these same Sautrāntikas to the negation of the present. That will be the task of Nāgārjuna. The discussion entails, moreover, other consequences: if existence is synonymous with presence, the unconditioned — nirvāṇa among them — must be present and their eternity must consist in a continuous presence. But the problem of the continuous present is that of continuous efficiency, considering that existence, in addition to being synonymous with presence is tantamount to efficiency as well. Are the

unconditioned efficient? Is space, which is one of the unconditioned efficient? Or will it be necessary, because of lack of efficiency, to deny them the condition of being present and, accordingly, to deny them existence? Just as the conditioned had been negated by negating their origin, so one sees the possibility of negating the unconditioned, except that, in order to affirm them, one also affirms the continuous presence of the conditioned, by giving up the consideration that what is specific to presence is effectiveness. Conditioned and unconditioned *dharmas* would then have to be identified in their invincible presence; and the original system of Buddhism, or the interpretation which has been made of this system, would have to be revised.

During the same period, the notion of time was subjected to criticism in the brahmanical circles as well.[29] At times the discussion was enriched, or guided in these same circles by the Buddhist philosophers. Criticism was directed especially against the notion of the present, since the difficulty of the problem lay in this concept rather than in those of past and future. From its first systematic expression, at the beginning of the Christian era, Indian thinkers understood that the notions of the present and of time were not as compatible as was supposed by the common understanding, and that they might even be contradictory. The Nyāyasūtras, prior to Nāgārjuna, as far as logic is concerned, although possibly chronologically posterior to him, confronted the problem of time in terms of the problem of knowledge. They maintained the reality of time and of its three moments, pointing out

that its negation would imply the negation of knowledge, which would be sufficient to reject the negation of time since knowledge cannot be negated.

According to the *Nyāyasūtras*[30] the negation of the present could be made by analysing movement. An object which falls cannot *be falling* in the present. The present of a moving object only implies position in space, and not duration or movement. That appears to be the meaning of the negation which *Nyāyasūtras*[31] propose to analyse. We cannot speak of an object which falls but rather of an object which has been falling. And if we affirm that the object shall reach the earth we understand that it has been falling and that it will be falling, but never that the object moves in the present, since movement and present are irreconcilable notions. The *has been falling* and the *will be falling* are notions which can be more easily denied, as they serve as terms of relation with the present. It is impossible to establish a relation between them in such a way so as to affirm them in the relation, since each one of them is, in time, the negation of the other, and this reciprocal negation does not leave room for any affirmation whatsoever. Before this situation, it is preferable to shift the problem, conditioning its solution to that provided for by the problem of knowledge. Time exists (and if time exists so does the past, the present, the future — since without these time is not time —) because if it did not exist knowledge would not be possible. For instance, the perception which is determined by the contact of the object with its corresponding sense and

which requires a simultaneousness, a co-presence of the *dharmas*, or the priority of one of these with regard to the other would not be possible. Co-presence, priority, posteriority: these are the concepts which correspond to the three moments of time.

In the chapter dedicated to the notion of time, Nāgārjuna tells us, first, that, for the affirmation of the moments of time, it is necessary to refer, once again, to relations which are not different from those established between the terms "above," "below," "in the middle" (or between the elements of the series of natural numbers[32]), in which each one is something by virtue of what the other is; in which each of them depends on the others without anyone finding its reason to be in itself nor can it, for that reason, affirm itself immediately. If the present and the future find themselves in a relation of dependence with respect to the past (and this holds also for any statement of relations between those terms), then they have to appear in the past, because if they do not appear in the past, one would not understand in what the past relations of dependence consist, where the suppression of the term which prevails implies the suppression of the term which is prevailed upon. If one wishes to affirm the moments of time, then it is not possible to resort to the criterion of dependence: dependence, in this case, as in all others, implies the impossibility of affirmation. To show the reality of the present, the past, the future, it is necessary to establish their existence independently of the relation which they maintain between themselves, because the real, that which possesses its own manner of being, an essence (*svabhāva*, being itself[33]), is, precisely

because it possesses it, by itself, without dependence. We have already tried to show, in speaking of the *dharmas* called conditioned, or dependent, that their dependence was impossible, and thence we could conclude that those *dharmas* had no more reality than the horns of a hare or the barren woman's son. The reality of the *dharmas* could not be based on a being in itself because they were declared to be dependent. Neither could it be based on a being which would be, as it were, borrowed and which would be foreign to them (*parabhāva*), since the impossibility of dependence has already been demonstrated. In no way can the present and the future be established apart from their relation with the past, if it is intended to establish them as temporal. And if they are established without this relation, then they will lose all temporality. No matter which of the moments of time is considered, the same process of criticism, which is none other than the one applicable to the terms "above," below," "in the middle,"[34] will be applied to it.

In the attempt to set up a new foundation of time, one may refer to the argument which provides the fact that time is measured. One speaks of an instant (*kṣaṇa*) and it is said that seventy-five instants is the time which passes when we snap the fingers, that two hundred and sixteen thousand instants form one hour, etc.[35] Thus, just as the atom is the limit of matter, as the syllable is the limit of the word, so is the instant the limit of time. And the instant exists, if we measure it, since it cannot be maintained that we measure the non-existent. The instant is

the time necessary for a *dharma* to be born once the conditions necessary for its birth are given. Of course, this concept of the instant is "subtle" and for that reason, some would maintain that "the Blessed One has not said what is the true duration of the instant, because no being is capable of understanding it." In sum, it is a matter of conceiving an instant, the limit of time, which perdures and which nevertheless does not imply the three moments of the past, the present and the future, and is only present.

Nāgārjuna asks himself if these measures correspond to time. Time can only be conceived of as unstable (*asthita*),[36] otherwise it would not be time. Nevertheless, by the same token, the unstable time is inconceivable. When one says "instant," will he not be speaking of something inconceivable? The words "day," "month," "year" do not prove the reality of time, just as the words "right," "left," "above," "below" do not prove the reality of anything, just as the knowledge of an object does not prove its reality. Time cannot be affirmed as real without attributing to its own mode of being (*svabhāva*), and this immanent mode of being is instability. As in the problem of causality and of movement, the reality of the present — if, with the Sautrāntikas, it is desired to reduce time to the affirmation of the present — offers this alternative: present time is stable or is not stable; if it is stable it is not time; if it is not stable it is not real. Āryadeva,[37] immediate disciple of Nāgārjuna, insists on this thought and maintains that to admit an unstable reality, an unstable essence (*svabhāva*) is to admit an instability which,

because it is unstable, would have to give up being stable in order to be converted only into instability. There is no sense in speaking of an (immanent) impermanent being. If we speak of the reality of time, we speak of its eternity, considering it to be an unconditioned *dharma*, for if we do not consider it in this way we would have to consider it as being either conditioned (in which case we would have to suppose an origin of time which would be prior to time) or non-existent, since, in a certain sense, one may say that the non-existent is eternal. If we concede that time is *dharma*, do we understand what is a *dharma*? If time is one, we cannot speak of the past as determinant of the present and the future. If it determines them, we would have to restate the problem raised by all of the relations; a question of the negation of time, in whichever of the two cases.

All these discussions have the appearance of a scholastic pastime. Even when one has succeeded in overcoming the difficulties of terminology and of thinking presented by the texts, the discussion prompts one, at certain moments, to share the opinion expressed by a western scholar: "the great defect of the Buddhists, the original sin of its speculation, is that it never makes a distinction between words, concepts and things."[38]

Nevertheless, at the bottom of this discussion about the problem of time dwell others. The Naiyāyikas transfer the problem to that of knowledge, which for them admitted only of an affirmative solution. The Buddhists of the small vehicle suspected perhaps that the problem of time was the very problem of being, and in the speculation

of the school of Nāgārjuna, the former was referred to the latter. There is not a real time which is existence (*bhāva*) which would have a self-essence (*svabhāva*). But neither can there be anything lacking in essence, anything which, being, would be without that essence which because it is its essence cannot be changing. Time cannot be affirmed as real without attributing to it a non-contradictory essence. The realist schools of Buddhism, reluctant to admit that the contradictions implicit in the notion of time and in this "subtle" instant which lasts and yet is solely present demand giving them up, resorted — once again, as so many times before in the history of thought — to a dogmatic expediency: the fact that time is incomprehensible does not justify the negation of time. Time is real, although we cannot understand its nature. Who can say that all the real is comprehensible?

Nāgārjuna cannot accept this argument, which would definitively confirm his position which is specifically that of the incomprehensibility of time. The realists say: "The nature of things is deep!" This profundity would prevent the postulation of a foundation of time. To the incomprehensible is reserved the privilege of not requiring this postulate of foundation which reason demands from certain concepts. The realists are concerned with this profound reality, but the Mādhyamikas do not concede that the rules of the game of logic imposed by the adversary are violated.[39] They prefer to insist on the problem, stating it in terms which refer to the problem of being: time cannot be affirmed of as real without attributing to it a self-essence (*svabhāva*) which can neither vary nor

be a variation. If time is real, it is a being. If it does not identify itself with a being, it would be independent of being; and if it is independent of being what can time mean without being? If being is an incomprehensible and contradictory notion, time should be negated, for the contradictory cannot be accepted as real. And what cannot be accepted should not be accepted.

Later, his disciples too will also speak of the "profound nature" of the real, and their adversaries will think that they are surprising them in the act of contradiction. The ultimate reality glimpsed by Nāgārjuna is unspeakable? So was ours! But to this a skilful disciple of Nāgārjuna would reply: we conclude that reality is unspeakable, but we do so after we have proved what we wanted to prove: that the obligation to choose between being and non-being, between affirmation and negation does not stand any analysis. The attitude of Nāgārjuna concludes, in fact, with the discovery of a reality. But the discovery of this reality cannot be confused with the arbitrary affirmation, the "fact of the prince" in the face of a discursive impossibility.

The analysis of the relations led to the discovery of the impossibility of affirming the terms which intervene in the relation. Neither could the terms of relation be affirmed independently of it. The union of the terms in a *dharma* was not possible; nor was the plurality of the *dharmas* possible if they were said to be related. The problem stated this way led always to a tautology or to a contradiction.

In what other way could the existence of any entity whatsoever be affirmed, if we make an abstraction of the relations in which this entity appears? An entity which does not present itself in any relation could not be affirmed because it could not be known, since knowledge itself is a relation : before seeing we will not affirm the existence of a seeing entity. If we did so we should, by the same token, admit the independent existence of vision[40] which would then be an addition to the seeing entity. The entity unknown in so far as it does not manifest itself, in so far as it does not intervene in any relation, cannot be affirmed. And a faculty which would be the faculty of this entity could not be affirmed either.

The only possibility of affirming the terms is that which results from the relation itself; but the relation is either tautological or contradictory. In the relation it was impossible to find the foundation of the related terms. It was equally impossible to find this foundation outside this relation. In both cases it was impossible to affirm any entity whatsoever (*bhāva*). The act-or does not affirm himself independently of the action. The moving object is not affirmed independently of the movement. The cause is not affirmed independently of the effect. The future is not affirmed independently of the present, etc. The entities do not affirm themselves independently of their faculties, characteristics or attributes. Neither can they affirm themselves subsequently to these. This would be absurd considering that beforehand one would have to affirm faculties, characteristics, attributes,

without knowing of what they are the faculties, characteristics, attributes. In short, one cannot affirm them within the very relation that is explained by them. Neither before, nor afterwards, nor at the same time can they be affirmed: consequently, never, since these are the three possible moments of the affirmation, and outside of these moments there is no affirmation.

The entity and its faculties, characteristics, or attributes, are or are not the same thing, and in neither of these cases are they conceivable. The fire and the fuel are one *dharma* or two *dharmas*. In the first case we would again have the identification of the agent and the action, which would be a tautology; in the second case, we would have a double affirmation of entities, independently of their relation, and the relation would be incomprehensible. This would result in the terms also being incomprehensible. If it did not depend on the fuel, if it were an entity in itself, the fire would burn incessantly and the fuel would never be consumed.[41] Dependent on the fuel, the fire would not burn, since for there to be fire it is necessary for something to be consumed and for something to be consumed it is necessary that there be fire.

Entities can neither be affirmed nor related nor without relation. One always finds oneself before the impossibility of attribution and before the impossibility of conceiving of something without attributes. If what we claim to attribute cannot be independently affirmed, there is no sense in trying to attribute it. If that to which we attribute something cannot be affirmed independently, there is no point in attributing anything to it. If the

subject of the attribution can be affirmed separately, it is not clear how the attributed can be essential to the subject of the attribution, since the subject affirms itself without necessity of that which we falsely attribute to it. There is no substance without attribute and there is no attribute without substance; and as there is nothing which is neither attribute nor substance,[42] attribute as well as substance are inconceivable; and they cannot be said to *be*, which compels one to conclude that nothing can be said to be. The existence of any entity whatsoever is illusory.

Are we then left with those entities which are identified with non-being? If this were so, we would have the absurdity of an illusory non-being, and what is not cannot be illusory, precisely because it is not. "If being is not, then it is non-being," one may say. A purely verbal statement. If being is not, then of what would the non-being be non-being? To formulate the problem by maintaining that the negation of being implies the affirmation of non-being is to ignore the problem itself. What is not cannot be affirmed, because the affirmation is affirmation of being and not of non-being. The so-called being lacks self-essence (*svabhāva*), since nothing can be attributed to it. And if it lacks essence it is empty: *śūnya*. Furthermore as the beings cannot be conceived of as being devoid of essence, they are not and non-being itself, devoid of essence, is not. Thus the non-being is not affirmed because it is denied being. To affirm non-being would mean recognizing the essence of being, an essence belonging to another (*parabhāva*) which cannot, without contradiction, be its self-essence.

Being as well as non-being lack essence; they cannot be affirmed. Being as well as non-being should be negated. The true nature of the beings in whom we think we recognize something which is specific to them and which cannot be taken away from them is like the nature of those hairs which are perceived by the *taimirika*, by the man who suffers from opthalmia, and are not perceived by the non-*taimirika*.[43] To affirm the non-being. because being is denied, is to lend to being an essence foreign to it; if we lend to non-being an essence foreign to it we admit that this essence is specific to something distinct from the non-being; and as what is distinct from non-being is being, the foreign essence lent to non-being is the self-essence of something which, on account of its having its own essence, really is. Then the being which we claimed to negate would remain affirmed in the affirmation of non-being. Thus everything lacks essence, and to nothing can be attributed its own or a foreign essence. Being as well as non-being should be negated because they lack essence: they are empty, since, by definition, anything that lacks self-essence is empty.

We would not be able to find an affirmation for the reality of being even if we had recourse to the theory which explains things in accordance with their origin. We know that being cannot find its foundation in non-being; but neither can it find it in itself. "Being does not proceed from being, non-being does not proceed from being; being does not proceed from non-being; non-being does not proceed from non-being." By itself, immediately, being cannot affirm itself, as has been amply

demonstrated earlier. Furthermore, being, explained without reference to the notion of the origin of being, is impossible, and, by the same token, the notion, of the origin of being is contradictory: being cannot have an origin, because it is — if it is — in its own absolute right. To negate this right by maintaining that beings are endowed with essence although this essence is present in them without the requisite of right and in a chance manner, is to falsify the problem, for when something is said to have a "foreign essence" it implies that this essence is specific to another being: heat is not essential to water, but for it to be present occasionally, accidentally, in the water, it is necessary for it to be essential in another thing, in fire, for example.[44]. Anything which is accidentally in something must be essentially so in something else.

There is no reason for being: apart from being, one would have to seek for this reason in non-being. And in non-being there is no reason capable of establishing anything; within it there is no reason either, since if there were it would not be the reason of being, since being, if it is, cannot be taken as its own reason because what is being discussed is itself the reason of being. To seek for the reason of being in being itself, is already to take being for granted: tautology. To seek for the reason of being outside of being is to negate being and affirm non-being: contradiction.

To maintain the existence of things, even if we recognize the impossibility of things having essence, is a new confusion: nothing can be without its "own" or a "foreign" essence, unless the being devoid of *svabhāva*[45] and of *parabhāva* is identified with

non-being, devoid in fact of its "own" and of a "foreign" essence. Nevertheless this concept of non-being — a new last refuge in which would be sought a possibility denied to being — is, as we have seen, absurd. By non-being is understood that which is foreign to being. Hence it follows that non-being is incomprehensible on account of the very incomprehensibility of being. Being is incomprehensible if it has its foundation in itself, and is equally incomprehensible if it has a foundation foreign to it. And because being is incomprehensible, it follows that non-being is incomprehensible.

This is a new presentation of the two heresies repudiated by Buddha since the start of his preaching. Compact, rigid, without origin or end, Being is negation of the Buddhist doctrine and leads to an eternalism (*śāśvatavāda*), in which nothing can be born or die. Non-Being leads to nihilism (*ucchedavāda*), to the total destruction without the possibility of birth or of death. What is in itself — and only that is which is in itself — is eternal. To affirm being implies affirming the eternity of this being. If that which is eternal, and if only that is which is eternal, we find ourselves before a being in which everything is impossible. And the affirmation of non-being places us before the same impossibility.

The only solution consists in denying this specific and immutable self-essence to things, without, for that reason, attributing to them a foreign and mutable essence. Things are empty. Being is empty, beings are empty. Non-being is empty, non-beings are empty. The void, *śūnyatā* is the only thing that could be said to be specific to beings. But it is specific to non-beings as well.

CHAPTER THREE

NEGATION OF KNOWLEDGE

Possibility of negative judgment. Negation in perception and in inference. Restrictions to negative judgment. — Knowledge and its object. Does knowledge affirm itself ? — "I do not have a thesis." — Negation as the special means of knowledge. — Knowledge and time. — The "vain discussions." — Brahminical criticism.

All *dharmas* lack essence and for this reason they may be said to be empty. But is not this affirmation, by the same token also a *dharma*, and to be vaild will it not be necessary for it to have an essence? It does not matter much that the judgment in which the affirmation is formulated has a negative appearance: *dharmas* do not have an essence. In some way, one is before a judgment. It shall be considered as negative. If in this judgment the essence of the *dharmas* is negated, what value does negation have, also recognized as a *dharma* devoid of essence?[1]

In fact the argument relates to the impossibility of negation: any negation implies the activity of judgment, which would posit itself as *dharma* even in the act which we call negation. If all the *dharmas* are empty, then judgment which is

dharma would also be empty, and could not negate. And if the judgment which negates is not empty, the thesis according to which all the *dharmas* are empty would have to be abandoned. Or is the judgment, with which something is negated, a special *dharma*, not empty? In the latter case it would be pertinent to give the reason which allows us not to include judgment among the *dharmas*.[2] If the word enables us to negate the essence of the *dharmas*, one shall have to conclude that all *dharmas*, less the word, are empty. Then the initial proposition which extended the emptiness to all *dharmas* would be negated. But let us admit the possibility of the negation. What would be the object of this negation if the objects which lack self-essence *did not exist*? Would one claim to negate what does not exist? No, since it has already been said that negation can only refer to the existent. Nāgārjuna would find himself facing this dilemma: either admit that the word, the judgment, are not empty, and thus have to admit that it is not possible to negate essence to all *dharmas*; or else admit that the word and judgment are empty and then have to admit, in the same way, that it is not possible to negate essence to all *dharmas*. By referring to an example, it can be said that the order "Silence!" determines the cessation of the *dharmas* voices. But this is possible due to the fact that this order is a *dharma* with its own essence, that it really is, because that which is not cannot be a cause, just as the non-existent sword cannot injure anybody.

Nevertheless Nāgārjuna belongs to a school

the followers of which are, according to one eastern critic, as obstinate as those who wishing to see a hair so fine that it is not visible, are not satisfied until someone pointing to the empty space, says; "Here it is!" Nāgārjuna negates the essence of the *dharmas*, and all these arguments negate the negation of the essence of the *dharmas*. Nāgārjuna maintains that all knowledge, because it is *dharma*, is empty. It is possible to argue, in the face of these arguments, that, all means of knowledge (*pramāṇas*) being empty, because they are *dharmas*, the negation of his thesis does make any sense, on account of its being empty. But to negate the thesis of Nāgārjuna does not mean negating the *dharmas* themselves, but rather the negation of the *dharmas*. The stance seems coherent since it is held that the *dharmas* cannot be negated, that the essence of the *dharmas* cannot be negated. Even when it is admitted that the word and the judgment cannot negate — that not even the negation of Nāgārjuna can be negated — he who would become liable to contradiction would be Nāgārjuna himself, since it is he who negates. If one affirms that the *dharmas* have essence, one has the right to say that the *dharma* cannot be negated.

Thus begins the criticism of the antagonist imagined by Nāgārjuna in order to continue making more specific his concept of emptiness and his negation of all the *dharmas*. The means of knowledge — perception, inference, authority, analogy — would in no case allow us to negate the essence, the reality of the *dharmas*. Should we have recourse to perception, for instance, in order to maintain that we negate the reality of the *dharmas* because we do not

perceive their reality ? If, by means of perception, we negate the reality of the *dharmas*, perception, is already the affirmation of the reality of a *dharma*. And if perception does not exist it is not possible to refer to it in order to negate the *dharmas*. The same could be said of the other three means of knowledge. If one negates these means of knowledge, which are the only ones, there will be no possibility of negating the essence of the *dharmas* since the negation implies one or other of these means of knowledge. If one negates the *dharmas*, neither will the possibility of its negation exist, even when the *dharma* called *means of knowledge* exists, because it is not possible to negate, for example, that which is not perceived. The non-existent *dharma* cannot be perceived, precisely because it does not exist, because it is empty. And nothing can be said of that which does not exist; the non-being does not admit either of affirmation or of negation. Nāgārjuna himself has shown this by studying the possibilities of affirmation or negation of being and of non-being. In an extreme case, it would be possible to negate the reality of the perceived *dharmas*, but the reality which can never be negated is that of the very *dharma* of perception. In the case of the *dharma* called perception, as in that of any other means of knowledge, there is an immediate affirmation which in order to be negated will require another argument. We can doubt the *dharmas*, but we cannot doubt the *dharma* in which we apprehend the *dharmas*, be the latter real or false. The same reasoning holds for inference, the second source or means of knowledge. It is possible to negate the inferred, and inference

can also lead to a negation. Nevertheless, in any case, the very *dharma* of inference remains affirmed. We shall always find ourselves in contradiction when we claim to negate, by means of perception and inference—which are *dharmas*—all of the *dharmas*. Perception and inference *can neither negate nor can they be negated.* What does the orthodox doctrine of Buddhism actually say? It speaks of good *dharmas* and evil *dharmas*. The doctrine tries to establish that the *dharmas*, whether good or evil, have self-essence, really are, and that the entire variety of the *dharmas* cannot be considered empty, *śūnya*.

By the principle which forbids negating that which does not exist, the *dharmas* cannot be negated if they lack self-essence. To speak of a lack of self-essence means either to attribute or not to attribute reality to this lack. If one attributes reality to it, one finds oneself in contradiction. If one does not attribute reality to it, then one violates the principle which forbids negating that which does not exist. To be valid, the very expression "lack of a self-essence" has to *be* and then with that, it is affirmed as a *dharma*. If it is not, the negation with which one tries to deny the *dharmas* is invalid. We always find ourselves before the impossibility of negating self-essence to all *dharmas*. Neither could it be said that, although the *dharmas* lack essence, the essences are in themselves, for if they were in themselves they would be *dharmas* and, in the affirmation of the essences, one would affirm the *dharmas* which one claimed to have negated as being devoid of essence.

The negative judgment is possible only in one

case: when the negated object exists although not at the present moment. That is, it is possible to negate the actuality of the *dharmas* but only when the *dharmas* have existence in some form. What is negated is the presence of what in some form *should* be. Negation can only affect that which is possible. It is negated that an object be given here, now; but it is not possible to negate that an object is neither given here, nor now, nor there, or never, in any manner. The negation is not valid, if it claims to be negation of existence itself. Any negation implies certain restrictions. At least it implies the restriction which the object that is negated imposes upon itself. And this object is, in some form, existent. If there is an earthen jar, we may say that here there is no earthen jar. If the jar exists—although only in our imagination—we may say, and only then can we do so, that the earthen jar is not given in this moment, here, in the reality of the now. But if in any way at all the earthen jar does not exist, the expression is meaningless and we will not be able to say that the earthen jar does not exist. The negation of the jar requires, like any negation, an object. If it is negated, it is an existence that is negated. If the self-essence of the *dharmas* never existed, anywhere, what would we be negating by negating it? No negation can be posited of what does not really exist.[3] The negation of what is not, is posited without the need of judgment, of fact. Insofar as a negative judgment is offered, by the same token is offered the object of judgment and the affirmation of this other object which is the judgment itself. If by saying that the *dharmas* lack self-essence one claims to

eliminate the error of those who think they perceive or infer an essence specific to the *dharmas*, it would result in affirming the reality of him who perceives or infers, of the perceived or inferred, of perception and inference; of the reality of the negator, the negated, and the negation. If we do not affirm the reality of the perceived, we cannot say that something is negated by means of perception. Finally, we find ourselves in a situation where all things and their self-essence stand affirmed and where no one has negated them nor could ever do so.

"The *dharmas* lack self-essence!" Is this observation founded on some reason (*hetu*)? It cannot be so, because when one negates the *dharmas*, one also negates the *dharma* called "reason." (What can "reason" mean in a doctrine where everything is empty?) If a judgment lacks the reason which is its foundation, of what does its validity consist? It is not possible to formulate this judgment, unless it is formulated without a reason which sustains it, in which case it would be possible to formulate any doctrine without a reason to sustain it — for example, the doctrine according to which all *dharmas* have self-essence. Nevertheless, if one claims that this judgment is founded on a reason, the contradiction reappears. How shall one establish on a reason this judgment which, by negating all of the *dharmas* negates the *dharma* "reason"?

Let us suppose—continues the imaginary antagonist — that in order to negate the essence of the *dharmas*, there is no need for any reason. Then, what would be the possible relations between negation and the object to which this negation

refers? There are only three possible relations: the negation is prior to the negated object, it follows it or it is simultaneous with it. In the first case, the object to be negated does not yet exist: how then will it be possible to negate it? If the negation follows the object, then the object already existed and its negation will be useless since the object has already affirmed itself on its own. And if negation and its object are simultaneous, both affirm themselves independently, without there being any relation between them. Thus the so-called negation of the object would not be the negation of this object.[3]

Nevertheless all this criticism can be revised. We began by saying that we can negate all *dharmas* less one, that of our word which negates, or that of perception or of inference — i.e. the means of knowledge thanks to which we negate. Were the word and the means of knowledge empty we could not use them to negate. Nāgārjuna replies that there would be contradiction or error in his position if he were to concede that it is possible to negate or affirm, since in this case he would, in fact, have to recognize that the *dharmas*, by means of which one negates or affirms, are not empty. But he does not maintain that a *dharma* can be neither affirmed nor negated, because upon saying that the *dharmas* lack a self-essence one does not exclude the *dharmas* called word, perception, inference, etc. The antagonist maintains that there are *dharmas* with self-essence, called means of knowledge. How is it possible to maintain such a position?

A means of knowledge is a *dharma* on a par

with the others. How can this *dharma* be established —affirmed or negated — without resorting to another means of knowledge? If we do not resort to a means of knowledge we will not establish it, since nothing can be established without a means of knowledge which enables us to establish it. If these *dharmas* were not established, would these *dharmas* be used as means of knowledge in order to establish other *dharmas*? That is, if the means of knowledge are not established, then they cannot be used to establish the *dharmas*. Shall we establish them resorting to another means of knowledge? How shall this other means of knowledge be established which has been used to establish the first *dharma*? It will require, by the same token, to be established by another means of knowledge: thus we will have a regression *ad infinitum* which cannot be a means of proof because with it "neither the beginning, nor the middle, nor the end is proved."[4] But let us return to the first possibility: to prove without referring to another means of knowledge. In this case, "we lose the sense of the discussion".[5] Why? Because we speak first of *dharmas* proved by means of knowledge, and subsequently of *dharmas* not proved by means of knowledge. The relation knowledge-object is liable to the same criticisms to which the other relations have been subjected. "The knowable object exists insofar as knowledge exists," Candrakīrti[6] argues. "And the knowledge exists insofar as the knowable objects exist. But in no case is there a reality independent of the knowledge or of the known objects." If the *dharmas* are proved by the means of knowledge, how are the latter proved?[7]

A solution, more brilliant than valid, will tell us that the *pramāṇas* (means of knowledge) prove the *dharmas* and prove themselves to themselves, just as light illumines objects and illumines itself to itself. The example would serve to establish the *pramāṇas* by analogy. However, that "the edge of the sword does not cut itself," we have already seen. Perhaps the example of the light has no more value than that of a sword which cuts itself.[8]

At a given moment we do not have light, in the following moment we have light. In the first moment the pot could not be seen, in the second moment, the pot can be seen. Does the light illumine itself as it does the earthen pot? If so, then in the first moment the light existed, just as the pot existed, although it could not be seen. If the light existed in the first moment, it was in the dark, like the pot, because if it had not been in the dark it could not have been said that in the second moment it illumines itself, since it would have illumined itself in the first instant.[9] If the light illumines itself, the light illumines the darkness, then in the first moment, when it did not yet illumine itself, either it was darkness or it was nothing. If it be said that the light actually illumines the darkness, Nāgārjuna will answer that where there is light there is no darkness since light and darkness are two opposites the simultaneity of which is impossible. Where there is darkness there cannot be light; where there is light there cannot be darkness. If this be acknowledged, where is the darkness which can be illumined by the light? An ingenuous answer is as follows: the light illumines, precisely because where it is there is no darkness nor can there be

darkness in the light itself. We must not speak of two moments, a first one in which there is no light and a second one in which there is a light which illumines itself. Furthermore, we must not interpret this "itself" as the light which is non-existent in the prior moment. The illumination of the light by itself must be understood as instantaneous. Light dispels the darkness in the very moment in which it is produced, and thus it illumines itself and the other objects. But this argument lacks force, because the light cannot reach the darkness, on account of the impossibility of the coexistence of the opposites. If it does not reach the darkness it does not dispel it, and if it does not dispel the darkness, it is not light. We would find ourselves here before one more example of the impossibility of the instantaneous action upheld by the disciples of the little vehicle. There would remain one last argument: the light dispels the darkness, but without reaching it. This would be a desperate defense manoeuvre: if, like a magic formula, light can act from a distance,[10] why does it dispel only this darkness and not all the darkness of the world? What reason is there for the fact that light does not dispel the other darknesses with which it is also not in contact?

The example does not help to show the possibility of knowledge proving the *dharmas* and proving itself. But suppose that knowledge proves itself to itself and that it is a special *dharma* considering that the other *dharmas* do not prove themselves. Then what relation would knowledge have with the other *dharmas*? The means of knowledge are given in a relation with the other *dharmas*, or they are not. If they are given in relation with the other

dharmas, they cannot prove themselves since if they do prove themselves they would not be in a relation with other *dharmas*. If they are not given in a relation with them then it is hard to see how they can be proved. If, in spite of proving themselves without relation with the *dharmas* the means of knowledge served to establish the *dharmas*, any other *dharma* aside from the four means of knowledge could serve to establish the *dharmas*. Once the means of knowledge are proved without relation with the *dharmas*, it becomes impossible to establish the relation of the means of knowledge with the *dharmas*. Why must these means of knowledge be applicable to the *dharmas*? If we conceded that they were applicable to the latter, we would not see how they could—considering that they are means of knowledge insofar as they apply to the *dharmas* —prove themselves without having recourse to the *dharmas*.

If we admit the relation of the *pramāṇas* with the objects, and say that they are *pramāṇas* precisely because they are in a relation with the objects, it would mean nothing to have said that they prove themselves. If they are proofs insofar as they are in relation with the thing to be proved, they depend, in their condition of proof, on the things to be proved. And if they depend on these things, they have to be proven in relation to them and not independently of them. But the objects are not yet proved, since the *pramāṇa* is what must prove them. And if the object is not proved, the *pramāṇa* is not proved, for the *pramāṇa* is only such insofar as it proves an object. If we admit that the objects are already proved, then the *pramāṇa* does not prove them, and is no longer a

pramāṇa. In more general terms, which refer to the earlier discussions: if the *dharma* and the *pramāṇa* are, what sense is there in speaking of the conditions of the *pramāṇa* and the *dharma*? If something is not, the same question applies: what meaning is there in speaking of their conditions. That is: what is proved by itself is not conditioned. Knowledge and its object are conditioned. Neither knowledge nor its object can be proved by themselves. If the terms of the relation knowledge-object (*pramāṇa-prameya*) are not proved by themselves, are void, the relation in which they are meant to be proved is void.

To uphold that the means of knowledge are proved precisely in their relation with the objects, compels one to ask this question: can the object, which is not proved, prove? If it is not proved, the object cannot prove. And if it is proved, how has it been able to prove itself? Can the object have proved itself in terms of the means of knowledge? No, because the means of knowledge prove themselves, in the case presently under discussion, in terms of the object. Could the object prove itself without relation to the means of knowledge? But then, what need would we have of means of knowledge meant to prove objects already proved without them? If the means of knowledge were proved in terms of the object it would no longer be possible to distinguish between the object and the means of knowledge, between *dharma* and *pramāṇa*, between the proved and the proving. The *dharma* which proves the *pramāṇa* would for that very reason be *pramāṇa*: *dharmas* and *pramāṇas* would be "one and the same thing."[11] Further, if the means of

knowledge proves the object and the object proves the means of knowledge, the object as well as the means of knowledge remain without being proved. Is it possible to insist on the discussion and uphold that the *pramāṇa* proves the *dharma* because the *dharma* is referred to the *pramāṇa*, and that the *dharma* proves the *pramāṇa* because the *pramāṇa* is referred to the *dharma*? It would be tantamount to postulating that they prove each other mutually, and this goes against the definition according to which *pramāṇa* is that which proves and *dharma* the proved. Finally, as it is not possible to maintain that the means of knowledge are established without any need of proof, we shall find that the means of knowledge cannot be proved by themselves nor among themselves, not by other means of knowledge which are not of the accepted four, nor by the objects, nor without proof.

Returning now to the original proposition, one must conclude that the argument according to which "we can understand that all *dharmas* have an essence, since there is a means of knowledge and an object of knowledge"[12] is not valid.

The word with which one negates the essence of the *dharmas* is also devoid of essence, because it has its origin in causes and conditions. But, even if it negates, the word does not thereby affirm itself. The act of negating does not imply the affirmation of the act which negates. The Sublime One once created a *nirmitaka*,[13] a fantastic being, and the gods also created fantastic beings such as the old man, the sick man and the corpse seen by the prince during his walks before resolving to seek the path of enlightenment. It was only to the prince and

his servant that the apparitions were visible, according to the story told by Aśvaghoṣa.[14] But the apparitions which Buddha created possessed, in their turn, a creative power. Like the Bodhisattvas and the sages, the Sublime One can set up apparitions in the future time and these apparitions address one another, expound the doctrine, inquire, are asked questions, and even determine the apparition of other fantastic beings: a fantastic being can, like Buddha, be a creator. The word which affirms or negates is an apparition which creates or kills another apparition. And thus just as an apparition can kill another one without because of that ceasing to be an apparition, in the same way the word can negate the essence of the *dharmas* without thereby affirming its own essence. One could object that behind all these apparitions is the real being which, by means of its creative power, gives them appearance. But this would betray an ignorance of the Buddhist doctrine: Buddha, creator of apparitions, is, by the same token, an apparition. It is the same with the word as it is with the man conceived by the art of magic, who kills another man also conceived by the art of magic: he who kills does not affirm himself as existent, by the fact of killing.[15] The two magic men are equally non-existent, in the sense that they are devoid of essence; both are *śūnya*, void. What essence can be found in the images which act within our dreams? Thus it is logically possible to negate by means of the word *śūnya* the essence of all the *dharmas*. The word is a king of illusion, of death, of nothingness, who kills another king of illusion, of death, of nothingness.

Void, the word does not constitute an exception

among the *dharmas*, is not excluded from them when Nāgārjuna negates essence to all dharmas. If in fact it were excluded it would have to give the reason for it, demanded by the adversary. Nāgārjuna insists that the word lacks essence, like all *dharma*. Likewise, what is accomplished in all *dharmas* is accomplished in the word as well: it lacks essence, it is void, because it can be given only in terms of causes and conditions. There would have been a betrayal of the thesis "all the *dharmas* are void" had the word constituted an exception. But the word is also *dharma* and what is said of "all the *dharmas*" is applicable to it as well. The example of the *dharma* "silence" would be valid, if this *dharma* were endowed with essence. But if it is provided with essence, its example does not correspond to the case of the word, since it has been said that the word is devoid of essence, like all *dharmas*. Nāgārjuna does not admit that the *dharma* "silence!" can cancel other *dharmas*. In order to do this, it would be necessary to admit, and Nāgārjuna does not do so, that this *dharma* is not void. What is being discussed is precisely whether or not the *dharmas* are void. If it is affirmed that one *dharma* cancels another *dharma* one would find oneself in a petition of principle, because it is already sensed that the *dharma* "silence!" is not void.

In fine, what would the refutation of Nāgārjuna's thesis entail? It would mean having to incur a petition of principle. "All the *dharmas* are void." If that is a judgment, it is a *dharma* and is also void. I may become liable to error, Nāgārjuna continues, if my judgment had its own essence; but this judgment

has no essence either. If the true nature of the *dharmas* is vacuity, how can one speak of judgment, that is, of an established proposition? How can one speak of the error of a judgment? What objection can one make to him who has no intention of establishing any proposition on any foundation? What error can one look for in that proposition, if it has been said that all propositions, like all *dharmas*, are void? To refute this proposition could not but lead to the demonstration that the proposition is void, that it lacks the reason which constitutes its foundation; and in this way the proposition that all the *dharmas* are void would be confirmed. Furthermore, if the proposition is admitted then it is equally admitted that all *dharmas* are void. To summarise: the proposition is true or false. If it is true, then the vacuity of all *dharmas* is established. If it is false, the vacuity of the *dharmas* is confirmed. With greater coherence than at the start of the discussion Nāgārjuna will say that he does not have any thesis to prove, since the demonstration of any thesis whatsoever is not possible. For this reason—his disciples shall ạdd—"it will take a lot of time to refute us."[16]

Nevertheless, it will still be possible to carry the argument further. *I do not have a thesis* is presented as a negation which must still be negated. It is not even possible to say that one does not have a thesis. "Who can say that the sage (*ārya*) has a thesis or does not have thesis? The sages maintain a silence regarding the absolute truth.[17] *I do not have a thesis* belongs as does *I have a thesis* to the order of common and superficial truth. The affirmation is impossible, and for this reason Nāgārjuna and his

disciples reject it. But the negation too is impossible and they reject it for the same reason.

There remains the invocation to Buddhist orthodoxy. Nāgārjuna forestalls his critics and sets out to maintain that his attitude is in agreement with the teaching of the Buddha. Admit the reality of the *dharmas*, but do not turn away afterwards from the consequences. For Nāgārjuna these are the consequences: once the self-essence of the *dharmas* is admitted, salvation becomes impossible, because by admitting *dharmas* whose essence does not depend on causes and conditions one denies that the doctrine consists precisely of the recognition of the dependent nature of the *dharmas*.[17] Of what did Buddha speak if not the law of the twelve causes, of the origin of suffering, in this way teaching that there are determining causes of the *dharmas*—and the determined lacks, by definition, its own essence—and that there is an origin of suffering, which lacks its own essence? To negate the origin of suffering—to affirm that suffering has its own essence—is to negate suffering. And if pain is negated, what sense is there in seeking for the suppression of pain? Does not Buddha teach exactly this, the suppression of pain? If it is not possible to suppress suffering, how shall it be possible to seek for the path which leads to the suppression of pain? The four noble truths stand rejected if it is asserted that the *dharmas* have self-essence. That is, if one affirms that there are *dharmas* with self-essence, one would be outside the pale of Buddhism. The consequences do not end here: if one speaks of non-caused *dharmas*, with self-essence, then one is speaking of eternal *dharmas* (considering that the eternal is that

which, without being caused, exists). Were the *dharmas* eternal, it would be impossible to attain salvation *in a given moment*, since salvation would not then be eternal. If the essence of the *dharmas* is established without dependence, the Buddhist theory of production in terms of causes and conditions (*pratītyasamutpāda*) must be rejected, together with the very doctrine of Buddha. We would be liable to contradiction if essence itself were established in accordance with that principle. The first position transforms this world into a permanent, invariable world; it transforms the vision offered by Buddhism of a changing and empty world into one of a stable world affirmed once and for ever. The second position is obviously absurd. One may argue that Buddha spoke of eternal, unconditioned *dharmas* which are not affected by the doctrine of dependent origination. We shall put off the consideration of this problem until later—a problem already solved in a general way in the analysis of the problem of being—and proceed to the other possible objections.

We designate things by names, or we believe that by means of names we designate things. Nāgārjuna should negate the very existence of names. But what is meant by saying that names do not exist. How must one interpret this non-existence of names? Can one claim that the non-existence of the name exists or that it does not exist?[18] In the first case we would have the existence of a non-existence. In the second case, we would have the non-existence of a non-existence. We contradict ourselves in the first case. In the second case we make the mistake of negating that which does not

exist, a procedure which has been already condemned, as we know that negation applies only to the order of the existent.

Nevertheless this argument repeats what was said about the wish to impose the existence of the word which negates or of the means of knowledge with which one negates. There is nothing to do but insist on the original position: all *dharmas* lack self-essence, and if they do not have self-essence they are void, and if they are void one may say that they are unreal. Any argument stems from the affirmation that something has essence, that it really exists, it is not void, and this is precisely what is under discussion. The word exists: consequently it cannot be said that all *dharmas* are void. Judgment exists: consequently it cannot be said that all *dharmas* are void. Names exist: consequently it cannot be said that all *dharmas* are empty. Is it not easy to see the impossibility of defending the thesis of the reality of the *dharmas*, with a statement which takes for resolved that which it desires to resolve? What is the subject under discussion? The thesis that *dharmas* are real, that they have their own essence. The above is negated and a demonstration of the thesis is demanded. To be precise, no thesis which can be criticised can be advanced by means of negation. When we say that the *dharmas* are void, we simply reject the thesis that the *dharmas* have their own essence. If we appear to be upholding a thesis as well (that of the *dharmas* lacking their own essence) we must understand clearly what we mean: we say that any thesis whatsoever is void, and that ours, if we had one, could not constitute an exception. Such an attitude is coherent

and not contradictory. There would have been contradiction if, in saying that all *dharmas* are void, one were not to acknowledge emptiness in that special case of the *dharma* constituted by the word or by the judgment. (If we submit this problem to the logical systems of the time of Nāgārjuna and those after him, it could perhaps be explained by examining the nature of the reasonings in which the *proposition* to demonstrate is itself a universal judgment the subject of which would be "all the *dharmas*." There is no possibility of demonstrating this proposition, since this judgment cannot be founded except by referring to itself. The proposition in which the subject is "all the *dharmas*" is not demonstrable. The act of judging always implies, and all the more so, in this case, either a tautology or a contradiction.)

Moreover, one tries to say that essence, that which affirms itself by itself, must exist in some way or other, although it cannot exist in the *dharmas*. Yet even when this is admitted, the position would be absurd, as it would affirm a *dharma*—essence—outside of the *dharmas*, and reality is constituted solely by *dharmas*. The critique is futile and is overly meticulous and cautious. Let us understand it well: the *dharmas* are void; the word, the judgment, the name, are *dharmas*. Consequently, the word, the judgment, the name are void. More precisely, according to Nāgārjuna, the problem must be posed thus: does one uphold that the *dharmas* have their own essence? We demand proof of it, and the adversary cannot provide it without falling into a petition of principle. But since we have negated that affirmation, the adversary understands that we have

formulated a negative judgment and that if we attribute any validity to our judgment we shall be liable to contradiction.

In conclusion, the problem is that of negative judgments, and, without an elucidation of its meaning, the entire controversy is useless.

If Nāgārjuna's position is understood as that of the positing of a thesis, the debate must turn around the possibility of affirming, when it is affirmed that nothing is affirmable. With the explanation provided by Nāgārjuna that there is no affirmation in his position, it would be relevant to look into the meaning of a negation such as his: "There are no *dharmas* with their own essence." The negative judgment, says the adversary, is possible in only one case : when the object to which the negation refers exists, although its existence is not at the present moment. What is negated is the actuality of the object. If the object exists at the present time, its negation is a false judgment. If the object does not exist in any way, its negation is not possible, since every negation refers to an object. Furthermore, a special mode of existence corresponds, in one form or other, to the negated object, because it is an object. (The adversary seems to uphold the Buddhist view developed subsequently by logicians such as Dharmakīrti and Dharmottara.)

The negative judgments cannot be judgments of experience. One of the legitimate means of knowledge, perception, does not ever provide us with a negative judgment, since perception arises out of the contact of certain organs with positive entities. The negative judgment relates to a non-existence, and non-existence, although it too is a possible object

of knowledge, cannot act upon the organs. For Kumārila and the Mīmāṃsakas, negation shall end up being considered as a special means of knowledge which has this very non-existence as its object. Nevertheless, this non-existence cannot be absolutely understood except in relation to something existent. Let us take the judgment "This is a jar" and the judgment "This is not a cloth." By these we mean that "this" exists insofar as it is a jar and does not exist insofar as it is cloth. The non-existence is the object known in the second judgment; but this non-existence cannot be given except in an existent object. Must we thereby conclude that existence and non-existence are both possible in a single object? No, if by existence and non-existence we understand existence and non-existence in general. Yes, if it is a matter of a particular existence — that of a jar — and of a particular non-existence — that of cloth. In this latter sense existence and non-existence can both be given simultaneously — as are simultaneously given colour and form, which are distinct and distinguishable although similar insofar as they are objects, one positive and the other negative, of knowledge, Furthermore, how do we explain the negative judgment, if we do not have recourse to perception? It could be taken for a judgment of inference: if, given the conditions necessary for an object to be perceived, the object is not perceived, the object does not exist at the moment and in the place to which the conditions refer. But this inference supposes a negative judgment: the judgment, we express by saying "the object is not perceived." *And how could we have the knowledge that the object is not*

perceived ? The perception of an object directly informs us concerning the existence of the object, without there being, in perception, any knowledge other than the knowledge of that existence. It is not possible to maintain that in the perception of the existent lies implicit the knowledge, as non-existent, of the *non-perceived,* since perception, because it results from the contact of the object with the senses, can refer only to existent objects, and never, in no way whatsoever, to non-existent objects. Therefore the non-existence of the object is neither known by means of perception nor by means of inference. Nevertheless there is a knowledge of the non-existent expressed in the negative judgment. Consequently the negative judgment corresponds to a special form of knowledge.[19] This special form of knowledge is direct, like perception, but it does not suppose the contact of the object with the senses. It is the knowledge of the absence of a contact or the knowledge of a non-existence. Non-existence is thus an object, since there cannot be knowledge which does not refer to an object. Neither could it be said that the perception of an object implies the knowledge of all that this object is not, because when someone who has the perception of "this," is asked: "Is it a cloth?," his knowledge that it is not a cloth is given immediately within himself, *without having been given prior to the formulation of the question.* Consequently, in the perception of the "this"—jar — the knowledge that it is not a cloth is not given; and neither does knowledge arise from influence.[20] That knowledge must necessarily have a special means. Just as affirmation cannot be knowledge of non-existence, negation — a special means of

knowledge — cannot be knowledge of existence. If the object is affirmative, the adequate means of knowledge is also affirmative : perception or inference. And if the means of knowledge is negation, its object must also be negative. Negation is a special form of knowledge, with its own specific object. Those objects are the entities: "non-cloth," "non-cow," "non-hare," only when these entities are given — as they are in fact given in the entity jar —can a negative judgment be formulated. Otherwise the negative judgment would be impossible.

There is no negation possible of that which does not absolutely exist. This is a principle to which all the logical schools of India have remained faithful. The *Nyāyasūtras*[21] had already posed the problem, asking themselves how the negative judgment was possible in general; how it was possible to say, for example, "This is not white." If in the "this" we have only the knowledge of the "this," how do we refer whiteness to it negatively. The *Nyāyasūtras* reply that when an object lacks a characteristic, this want is already its characteristic: the "this" presents itself as being characterized by the non-existence of the "white." But can one speak of a non-existent, absent, characteristic ? Could it not be that this characteristic "white," considered as non-existent, exists in some way ? The Buddhists shall prefer to maintain that whiteness, negated from the "this," exists; that the cloth, negated from the *here*, exists; and that, in order to formulate the judgments "this is not white," "here there is no cloth," the existence of the whiteness and of the cloth is necessary, *in representation*. To negate whiteness, the cloth, means to always affirm whiteness, the cloth;

if we did not have at least a representation of whiteness, and of the cloth, in agreement with the principle according to which negation must be referred, in one way or another, to that which is given. The later Buddhists shall maintain that negation is possible when, given the conditions necessary for the perception of something, this something is not perceived. But for the whiteness and the cloth to be said to be given neither in the this nor in the here, it is necessary for the whiteness and the cloth to be given as representations. Although they are absent the white, the cloth are present. What is not represented cannot be negated, for then we would have a negation of the absolutely inexistent.[22]

Nevertheless, whether one adopts the primary attitude which does not hesitate to attribute reality to non-being, or affirms instead that non-being escapes the possibilities of the judgment and the latter refers only to the present or absent being, the problem remains unsolved, for the question still remains: "How is absence recognized ?," or "How is non-presence recognized?" The most simple and least satisfactory solution remits the problem to inference, forgetting that the negative judgment of reasoning already supposes a negative judgment (that which serves as reason) which is what one is trying to explain. The most radical solution remits the problem to perception, forgetting that it is not possible to have a perception of the non-existent. Nāgārjuna goes much further than the later philosophers. In the face of the difficulty of negative judgments (of a knowledge which would have to refer to a reality, like any knowledge, and which cannot refer to it, for if it is referred to a reality it must do so by

affirming, and not by negating it) he opts for the condemnation of the negative judgment itself. He is bound to this judgment if he proceeds from the principle according to which affirmation or negation — judgment — can be referred only to that which is, for it is not possible to affirm or to negate that which is not. His method consists in reducing the judgment itself, be it affirmative or negative, to absurdity although this reduction to absurdity itself appears absurd. In the method itself is affirmed the very activity of the judgment, which one claims to negate. The essence of the *dharmas* — the adversary would say — cannot be negated. If it be negated and if the judgment whereby it is negated is true, then the *dharmas* have essence.

The essence of the *dharmas* exists, since it can be refuted. The refutation of the essence implies the recognition of the essence of the *dharmas* in general and the recognition, in particular, of the essence of the *dharma* called judgment.

Here we find ourselves in the attitude, so familiar to us in the West, according to which nothingness can neither be affirmed nor thought of nor can it contain something more than the concept of something (the latter and its negation). Strictly speaking, we cannot refer to nothingness either affirmatively or negatively. In the face of nothingness the quality of the copula is dissolved. Every judgment is either affirmative or negative, and affirmation, as well as negation, is incompatible with nothingness. Nothingness cannot be affirmed, nothingness cannot be negated. Indian thought has laid emphasis on the second aspect, for the negative judgment has in it an importance greater than what obtains in the

Western tradition. Nāgārjuna concedes that what is not cannot be negated. Affirmation and negation only make sense insofar as they refer to that which is. The Buddhist texts abound in the formulation, in a variety of forms, of this principle: that which is not is neither affirmed nor is it negated. The affirmation — as well as the negation—of that which is not implies contradiction.

What does Nāgārjuna affirm, if indeed he affirms something? *Śūnyatā*. Thus, to negate *śūnyatā* would mean, according to this principle, to acknowledge it. "All the *dharmas* are deprived of essence, they are void." Is this negated? By being negated *śunyatā* is acknowledged and admitted as existent. *Śunyatā* is affirmed by Nāgārjuna and negated by the adversary. How can one claim to negate *śūnyatā*, if it is affirmed and negated, and if it has been said that what is not can neither be affirmed nor negated? One may insist by saying that *sūnyatā* is negated without necessity of a judgment. *Śūnyatā* is negated de facto in reality "just as cold is negated in the flame." *Śunyatā* cannot be affirmed, because it is not. And it would not need to be negated, precisely because its negation is given in fact. Judgment always affirms. If the essence of the *dharmas* did not exist, what would be negated by the judgment which claims to negate the self-essence of the *dharmas*? Nothingness, and nothingness cannot negate itself. Negation is always negation of something. Better still, negation is impossible unless it is understood as negation referred to a given moment in time-negation relative to the present, affirmation with regard to the past or the future — or to a location in space—negation relative to the here, affirmation with regard

to the there. Nāgārjuna's position was shown to be absurd if one proceeded from the hypothesis "all *dharmas* have essence." Now the absurdity is equally demonstrated, if one proceeds from the other hypothesis: "the *dharmas* do not have essence." In the case in which the *dharmas*, have essence as well as in the case in which they do not have any, the negation of that essence is impossible. In the first case, because it would militate against the hypothesis. In the second, because the very meaning of the negation would be ignored. On the other hand, once the essence of the *dharmas* is negated, we know that the essence of the word, of perception, of judgment, is negated. And if these are negated and one were to try to save the possibility of negating the essence of the *dharmas*, we shall encounter the possibility of negating the essence of the *dharmas* without necessity of the word, of perception, of judgment.

All this discussion is a process in which the concept of *śūnyatā* and the negation of the reality of the *dharmas* becomes clearer. Once the discussion has begun in, agreement with the interpretation which the adversary makes of the doctrine of Nāgārjuna, the latter seems to affirm that the *dharmas* lack their own essence. Immediately, with the first objections, it is made clear that such an affirmation does not exist: "There can be no error in my thesis, because I do not have a thesis." Nāgārjuna's position then must be negative. Once the statements necessary to the problem of negation have been made, Nāgārjuna hastens to observe: "I do not negate," just as before he had said: "I do not affirm." The affirmation would have led to

a recognition of the thesis of the adversary. Negation would lead to the same. If one affirms, if one negates, one falls into contradiction. The essence of the *dharmas* cannot be affirmed, because the essence of the *dharmas* does not exist, Nāgārjuna said. Now he says that he does not affirm the void of the *dharmas*, for he knows that affirmation demonstrates the essence of something. He adds that, as the essence of the *dharmas* does not exist, it cannot be negated, for its negation cannot refer itself to a non-existent object. There are no negatable objects; there is no negation. What sense is there in refuting Nāgārjuna who neither affirms nor negates? Earlier, the discussion seemed to make sense, since as affirmation was attributed to Nāgārjuna. Now we note that it is meaningless. Nāgārjuna does not even negate anything. And how can one who neither affirms nor negates be refuted? When Nāgārjuna's position was understood as the affirmation of the inessentiality of the *dharmas*, it was claimed that Nāgārjuna acknowledged the inessentiality of the *dharmas* as a *dharma*. But Nāgārjuna did not wish, with this apparent affirmation, to determine the existence of the inessentiality of the *dharmas*. It was not a matter of trying to convert, by means of judgment, inexistence itself into a substance. By saying that things lack essence he did not wish to affirm this "lack" as a substance, to convert *śūnyatā* into a *thing*. In the same way, when his judgment presented itself as a negation, Nāgārjuna did not presume that his judgment would suppress the essence of the *dharmas*. For example, we say: "Devadatta is not in the house," and someone replies: "Devadatta is in the house," The first judgment is true not because

it determines or creates the non-existence of Devadatta in the house, but rather because it expresses the fact that Devadatta is not in the house. This is what common sense understands by a negative judgment. Naturally no one suppresses the existent by the act of negating it. No one imposes it by the act of affirming it.[23] But independently of all this, we know that the negative judgment appears to affirm itself. We also know that, even when the judgment acquires the form of a self-negation, it would be affirming itself in the mere function of negating itself. To say that the negative judgment "Devadatta is not in the house" is a warning made in order to avoid the error of what is made to exist in the presence of Devadatta, means to affirm the warning, he who warns and the warned, as real. In this way, the innate essence of the *dharmas* would again be affirmed. Nevertheless this argument refers to the same question, already discussed, of the word which negates. However, let us suppose that the word does not negate itself. Would it thereby be affirmed? Is that which is not negated in fact affirmed ? Does it affirm itself directly? If we wish to grant this privilege which we call means of knowledge to the *dharmas* it will be pertinent to refer once more to the discussion in which was demonstrated that the means of knowledge cannot be proved by themselves. The affirmation of the word, of the judgment, by themselves, is in fine, an illusion. Nevertheless, it cannot be said that, insofar as they are illusions, they *are*, that they are provided with self-essence. Illusions lack innate essence, they are empty, because they belong to the realm of dependent origination: if the illusions had

a self-essence, it would not be possible to eliminate them, and yet illusions are eliminated.

Nāgārjuna has invented an adversary who does not understand him and who, because of this, remains always outside of the problem. Otherwise, how, could this adversary demand a reason on which to base Nāgārjuna's proposition ? What Nāgārjuna negates is precisely that there are valid reasons, that there is the possibility of upholding a thesis. And if in the course of the discussion it was understood that he has a thesis, he immediately makes it clear that his very thesis is inconsistent and that the concept of *śūnya* can be applied to it, as to all the *dharmas*. All thesis are void : so is his, if in fact he actually has a thesis.

The proof "of the three times," adduced in order to show the impossibility of negation, now turns against the adversary. The notion of time constituted, in the speculation of that period, the general proof to which any affirmation had to be submitted when time is divided into its three moments, the affirmation of any existence whatsoever had to be referred to at least one of them. In order to uphold the validity of the means of knowledge the *Nyāya-sūtras* respond, in the first place, to the argument according to which the means of knowledge do not exist, since they can be conceived of in none of the three moments of time if they are to be related to known objects. It was conceded, in accordance with the formula which will have become classic, that perception arises from the contact of the object with the senses, and the intention was to show the impossibility of knowledge by means of the same reasonings which Nāgārjuna's adversary took up in order

to demonstrate the impossibility of the negative judgment. The *Nyāyasūtras*[24] reply that the means of knowledge cannot, if they do not exist, be negated, and this agrees with the repeated principle. Moreover, if the means of knowledge do not exist, neither can it be generally possible to negate, since the negation affirms the means of knowledge which it claims to negate. Furthermore, if the validity of the negation be accepted, there can, in fine, be no possible negation of the sources of knowledge.[25] Nevertheless, to utilise the adversary's arguments in order to show the impossibility of the negative judgment no longer has any power to undo Nāgārjuna's position, as the latter has said that he does not negate, he does not have a thesis. It is the adversary who has a thesis: "All *dharmas* are provided with self-essence." And this cannot be demonstrated without a petition of principle: any proof given would be a proof of itself. The argument of the three times is the proof of the impossibility of negation, as well as that of the impossibility of affirmation. "Are all *dharmas* provided with their own essence?" The "Treatise to avoid vain discussions" is reduced to begging for the demonstration of this thesis. And the adversary cannot give it. It is naive to say that the negation of this thesis cannot be demonstrated either. If what is negated in the negation of this thesis is the possibility of the demonstration how can one fall into the contradiction of insisting on the demonstration of the exact opposite of that which one would have wished to demonstrate? A thesis has been proposed as being demonstrable, and the arguments with which to demonstrate it have not been given. If the discussion is forced by

saying that negation, because it negates itself, ceases to be negation, then that which is mistakenly called negation is not accorded the value it really has: that of being a demand to suspend judgment. And no proof can be required of this suspension of judgment. Judgment is that which requires proof; and judgment cannot find this suspension except by bringing it out of itself. When it is suspended judgment does not become thereby the void of the *dharmas* as a *dharma* provided with essence, because that void is empty.

Reality of the external world, exclusive reality of thought, absolute void : Buddha would have taught these three different doctrines "to deceive beings." That is the first interpretation which brahminical orthodoxy gives of the strange Buddhist phenomenon. But in trying to expound it, it proceeds with obvious inaccuracy. Baladeva[26] attributes to the Mādhyamikas the thesis that *śūnyatā* is the only reality because, not requiring reason to constitute its foundation, it proves itself. He then raises an objection which shall much later be repeated by Rāmānuja: what is this void? Being, or non-being? Being and non-being? If after affirming being, it is said that all is void the thesis that one is trying to prove is contradicted. If it is affirmed as non-being, and if in the thesis it is affirmed that all is void, a contradiction is again incurred, for with the establishing of the thesis a reality which cannot be void is affirmed. Contradiction would be also incurred if it were maintained that the void is, at the same time, being and non-being. At any rate, that which is affirmed must be real, if it is true. And, if something is affirmed, it cannot be affirmed that nothing is affirmable.

Again we find ourselves confronting the "vain discussions" which Nāgārjuna wished to avoid. This explains why Śaṅkara did not deign to criticise the Mādhyamikas. According to Śaṅkara, the walls of Buddhism stand "on foundations of sand" and hence they will collapse. To resort to Buddhist doctrines, in the practical life, is sure madness: Buddhism is responsible for having preached at the same time three distinct systems, which shows that it was inclined to incoherent affirmations or that it hated men and, because of this confused them.[27] Those who seek salvation should reject the doctrines of Buddha, especially the doctrine of *śūnyatā* which is the most absurd doctrine of all and even less worthy of criticism than the doctrine of the Vaiśeṣikas. After criticising the instantaneousness of the Little Vehicle and the idealism of the Yogācāra-positions which are, for him, equally nihilist—he states that the doctrine of the "third type," that of those who uphold that all is void, is contradicted by all the means of knowledge and does not require a special refutation. For Śaṅkara the absence of contradiction is a criterion of truth; and the means of knowledge prove, without contradiction, the reality of the objects. Śaṅkara forgets that the means of knowledge is subjected to criticism by the Madhyamikas and that they condemn it in terms of the contradictions which it implies.

Rāmānuja does not do much more justice to the Mādhyamikas. He echoes Baladeva, adding that the theory of the void, kernel for the Mādhyamikas of Buddha's doctrine, would consist of an offer of a salvation in the non-being. He also attributes to the Mādhyamikas the evident foundation of the void

because a reason foreign to itself could not be demanded of it. He remembers, as does Śaṅkara, that affirmation and negation can refer only to certain aspects or states of the real; that the affirmation "all is void" cannot but refer, for that reason, to states or aspect of the real; that the void cannot be affirmed except through some means of knowledge etc.[28] Once more, the critique of the theory of the void seems to ignore the "Treatise on vain discussions."

Kumārila does not view with quite as much disdain the upholders of the void. A prolific writer, he devoted himself to criticizing the doctrine without being inhibited by pangs of conscience, as might have secretly plagued Śaṅkara, the "Buddhist in disguise." He gives a detailed analysis of the Buddhist doctrines of idealism and of the void, expounding them in such a way that the second appears as a restrictive consequence of the first. The idealists maintain that there is no external reality which corresponds to thought. The Mādhyamikas make their negation bear on the ideas themselves. Once the reality of the external object is suppressed there follows the suppression of the reality of thought. This presentation of kumarila is the same one offered in other criticisms of the Buddhist speculation. In the Sāṁkhya system the criticism of Buddhism begins with an attempt to show the falsehood of the idealist position with the argument that the reality of the object is apprehended directly. The doctrine of the void — to which the idealist doctrine would naturally lead —is said to have no meaning and can only be defined by persons lacking in intelligence.[29] Mādhava also considers that in Buddhism can be noted a development which pro-

ceeds, "with the intrusive step of a beggar," from the momentariness of the *dharmas* to the total void where it is possible to free oneself from the four alternatives: being, non-being, being and non-being, neither being nor non-being.[30] But Kumārila does not believe that the criticism of the idealist school implicitly contains the criticism of the doctrine of the void. If we succeed in showing that knowledge does not know itself, there would immediately result —Kumārila says—the necessity of accepting the object of knowledge as external to the latter, because of the simple fact of the existence of knowledge. The thesis which might claim to negate all knowledge could not be established, since the negation of the possibility, in general, of knowledge entails the negation of the possibility of knowing the thesis which one seeks to establish, unless it be maintained that knowledge itself is not a reality, in which case one would not know what is meant by speaking of knowledge and of the impossibility of knowledge. Negation cannot be directed at knowledge in general, but rather at the knowledge of a determined object. There is a knowledge, expressed in the negative judgment, which seems to have as object a non-entity, which would mean that there is a knowledge without an object external to it, since no one will hold that a non-entity is an object external to thought, nor that knowledge can be given without an object—be this object the knowledge itself or an entity external to it. What deserves to be analysed, with the problem thus posed, is the possibility of the negative judgment, because it is that which in fact lends itself to the foundation of a theory in which knowledge would not require an object exter-

nal to it. If one wanted to prove thal *all* knowledge lacks an object, and not that determined knowledges lack objects external to it, then there would arise the impossibility of discussion and of reasoning. If there were no objects, it would not be possible to speak of them. And if there were no external objects, it would not be possible to speak of objects which *appear* to be external. But knowledge has its objects in the external world, and on them it depends. There is no contradiction in this affirmation, and the absence of contradiction would be sufficient—Kumārila continues—to reject the idealist thesis. Nevertheless, if what is being sought is to maintain the impossibility of all knowledge, as do the supporters of *śūnyatā*, it is hard to understand why the Buddhists reject as false the other doctrines and do not reject as false their own doctrines as well. Kumārila promptly sets out to study the problem of negative judgments, giving them the solution now familiar to us, and concludes with the question: "From whence does one infer the incapability of non-existent objects to determine knowledge?," which would be the reply to this other question: "How can a non-existing object determine a knowledge?" To progress in the discussion it would be necessary to accept the validity of the reasoning. Those who uphold the doctrine of the void can no longer join in the debate, since they negate all existence. Furthermore, it is useless to have recourse to the procedure of accepting with mental reservations a few of the earlier propositions, as the propositions, in order to serve as the basis for a discussion, must be accepted as true by both parties.

This is the critical point of the discussion. The

Mādhyamikas maintain that, with the problem thus posed, they are asked to renounce the discussion itself even before the discussion. The thesis that the Mādhyamikas want to discuss is not that of the validity of reasoning but that of the existence of *dharmas* with self-essence. Kumārila, who is the one who[31] expounds the point of view of the idealists and that of the Mādhyamikas, with great respect, ignores or pretends to ignore that his argument had been presented and analysed by Nāgārjuna himself.

In fine, the Mādhyamikas wishing to a void vain discussions, would have achieved, in India, a good deal more: to avoid all discussion, to be expelled from the discussions. Like Baladeva and Śaṅkara, Kumārila ends up depreciating them. The disciples of Nāgārjuna—Aryadeva, Buddhapālita, Bhāvaviveka, Candrakīrti—shall in vain insist on their being allowed to state the problem anew. They will limit themselves, within the brahminical milieu, to reply: this is not to state problems, but to eliminate them. And if the problems are eliminated, the discussions get eliminated as well.

In spite of this, the Mādhyamikas do not resign themselves to forgetting their dialectical vocation. Having no opponents outside of Buddhism, they sought them within Buddhism itself. Only thus can one explain the fact that the Mādhyamikas present themselves as the negators of the Buddhist theses, since the other Buddhist monks were the only ones willing to argue with them. Did not the doctrine of *śūnyatā* want to be an interpretation, *the* interpretation of Buddha's teaching.

CHAPTER FOUR

NEGATION OF SPACE AND OF NIRVĀṆA NEGATION OF NEGATION THE SUSPENSION OF JUDGMENT

The unconditioned *dharmas*. Emptiness of space and of Nirvāṇa. Saṃsāra and Nirvāṇa. Negation of emptiness. The suspension of judgment. The "nihilism" of Nāgārjuna. *Śūnyatā* of *Śūnyatā*.

One must not attach oneself to things; all attachment conceals the pain of the inevitable separation, because whatever has an origin must have an end. This is a commonplace in the Buddhist teaching, but a naive tenet nevertheless because attachment is impossible, and if it were possible, it could not come to an end. That which is united cannot be separated, and that which is separated cannot be united. To unite the separated: a contradiction in terms. To unite the united: tautology. Where there is distinction, union is impossible. Where there is no distinction, union is also impossible, because it already is.[1]

The monks of the new Buddhism aspired, by means of the sacrifice of their own personal salvation, to the salvation of all beings. They were not the *arhats* of the little vehicle, seeking refuge in

their proud solitude. They were the *bodhisattvas* who surrendered themselves to the ecclesiastical contemplation of a world destined, by means of charitable sacrifice, to liberate itself of all attachments. In the commentary which Nāgārjuna had written on the *Prajñāpāramitā*,[2] the *arhats* who had crossed the ocean of old age, of suffering and of death, said to themselves, without anguishing over the disappearance of the Master: "Let us enter Nirvāṇa." And they entered into the final nirvāṇa. But other monks thought: "The sun of Buddha has set. The light of the disciples has also been extinguished. Who will cure the living beings who suffer from all sorts of pains?. . . The tree of the *dharma* has been felled; the cloud of the *dharma* has dispersed." Whereupon those beings threw themselves at the feet of Mahākāśyapa and implored him not to let the world be overwhelmed by the darkness of ignorance. And the great Kaśyapa ascended to the top of mount Sumeru, "struck the bronze *gandi* and recited this *gāthā*: "*Oh, disciples of Buddha: keep the memory of the Buddha. Do not enter Nirvāṇa*!"

The disciples, responding to the call, resolved not to enter Nirvāṇa. It was necessary to establish the words of the Master, so that the salvation of beings would always be possible. After a severe penance—because he too had experienced the proximity of impurities—Ānanda, concentrating his mind, joining his hands, returned to the place of the Nirvāṇa of Buddha and spoke thus: "When Buddha expounded the Law for the first time...."

Buddha was by then nothing but a name, he had been extinguished by the wind of impermanence. But Ānanda remembered the doctrine exactly and

could recite it at the council. The salvation of the beings was assured.

This would be the version of Nāgārjuna himself. But the negator could not restrain himself, even before his own words, because his words belonged to the order of the mundane and expressed but a "superficial knowledge," a truth which corresponds to the vision of the blind and not to the vision of the one who sees. The truth which goes beyond the surface of things taught that there is no salvation, because there is no impermanence from which we must free ourselves, nor is there a suffering to the extinction of which we can aspire.

If nothing is impermanent, as has been shown by the impossibility of change, and of movement, what sense is there in speaking of suffering, of the origin of suffering, of the way which leads to the cessation of suffering, of the cessation of suffering? Suffering cannot have an origin either. Where does suffering find an origin? In itself? But then suffering already is and does not originate. In something distinct from itself? But in this something, distinct from itself suffering in not, and if it is not, how is it going to be produced? And even if we admit that suffering can be produced in spite of not being, how shall we affirm that suffering is produced by something in which suffering is not? In what will we recognize the origin of suffering, if in that which gives origin to suffering there is no suffering? There can be no origin of suffering; there can be no suffering; there can be no way which leads to the cessation of suffering; there can be no cessation of suffering.[3] Suffering cannot eternally be, because we claim to be able to free ourselves from it; but since

suffering cannot have an origin, suffering is not. But if because suffering does not have an origin we consider it eternal how can we believe that we follow the teachings of the master who spoke of the cessation of suffering? Could the Blessed One speak to us the absurd language of the cessation of the eternal? Could he be Blessed and yet teach a misleading doctrine ?

There is no *saṃsāra*, there is no suffering, teaches the true doctrine. And because it teaches one to discover that there is no *saṃsāra* nor is there suffering, the doctrine teaches the liberation which consists in migrating from *saṃsāra* and in freeing oneself from suffering. Only ignorance is linked to *saṃsāra* and to suffering, the ignorance which believes in *saṃsāra* and in suffering. That which has an origin, that which has an end, that which is subject to conditions, lacks self-essence, as the analysis has shown, because essence and condition are contradictory.

But will not the unconditioned *dharmas* (*asaṃskritas*) not subject to the exigencies of "raison d'etre" foreign to themselves, not subject to origin nor to death, pure, simple, unable to be affected, "persistent in their essence," independent of time, have their own self-essence? The unconditioned dharmas were space (*ākāśa*), and the two destructions (*nirodha*): the destruction due to the absence of the cause (like the extinction of the flame without fuel) and without knowledge of the truths (like the death of those that are born without life), and the destruction of the truths by knowledge which does not leave a residue.[4] Unconditioned: without composition, because they are not governed by the law

of the dependent origination; without change, because impermanence cannot devour them.

But what is this "unconditioned" space? It is characterized by the absence of the tangible, some texts[5] say. Matter can exist freely in it, because space "does not prevent it." Matter, on the other hand, where it is encountered, offers a resistance to being displaced by other matter.[6] It is recognized because it can be pointed out as existing "here, there," and because it can be divided, it does not offer resistance to space, just as space does not offer resistance to it: neither of them displaces the other. Immutable, space cannot be a cause: the seed does not sprout from it. It cannot undergo effects: the artist's brush does not colour it. When the world is destroyed, after a cosmic period, "only space remains"[7] until the "primordial wind" rises in it and in the wind the world emerges once again.

This is said of space. But space does not exist, it cannot exist with its self-essence. The proof of this is as simple as that of the non-existence (insofar as they lack self-essence) of the unconditioned. Omnipresent and eternal space seems to be demonstrated by the possibility of movement.[8] But, as has been already demonstrated, movement is not possible. In what other form could the reality of space be based? Is the mere absence of matter sufficient to affirm this reality? The absence of matter cannot be a characteristic of space, nor of any *dharma*, precisely because it is absence. Moreover, as matter is not an unconditioned *dharma*, space — unconditioned — would have to be prior to matter. And as long as space is prior to matter there is no sense in saying that the characteristic of space is the absence of

matter. With space lacking characteristics, the *dharma* designated by the word "space" is a non-existent *dharma*. Space is simply a word. Its very lack of characteristics allows us to speak of the purity of space. Hence it is said: "Buddha is like space,[9] without origin, without destruction. This *dharma* called space does not deserve greater analysis than any other: it cannot be conceived of as a substance with attributes, since substance as well as its attributes are in themselves incomprehensible and, as a result, the relation in which they would be given simultaneously is also incomprehensible. If, in order to be understood, the substance requires the help of the attributes, and if by the same token the attributes need, in order to be understood, the help of substance, neither substance nor attributes can be understood, affirmed as real, for they lack self-essence. And if they lack self-essence they lack foreign essence, since we know that there are no conditioned *dharmas* with self-essence which could be taken as being foreign in the unconditioned. Space lacks essence, self or foreign. Can one then speak of the reality of space?[10] Space is void, like time, like the *dharmas*, like nirvāṇa itself.

Does not nirvāṇa exist? Is nirvāṇa also empty? How is it, then that we speak of obtaining nirvāṇa? This is the old theme.[11] Is not nirvāṇa the destruction of suffering, the end of *saṃsāra?* What kind of doctrine is preached, for the aspiration to nirvāṇa, if nirvāṇa is a *dharma* void like all other *dharmas*.

Nirvāṇa is void. There can be in it no destruction of suffering, because there is neither destruction of suffering, as we know, nor is there any possibility of destruction in nirvāṇa. There can be nothing in

nirvāṇa: neither impermanence nor refuge, nor liberation.[12] In it there are no beings, nor *dharmas* which can be desired. For this reason nirvāṇa is still more awesome than the world of the conditioned *dharmas*. Who shall attain nirvāṇa if there are no beings with self-essence, if there is no time in which nirvāṇa can be attained, if there is no suffering which must be extinguished? "No one obtains Nirvāṇa!"[13] Horrible place, this nirvāṇa ! But this doctrine has been preached precisely to terrify stupid minds.[14] This is the true doctrine, because the Master said that there was no sense in asking whether after nirvāṇa we would be or would not be, whether after nirvāṇa the Tathāgata himself would be or would not be. It is proper to apply space to nirvāṇa, to all the conditioned or unconditioned *dharmas* the same criticism to which being and non-being were subjected. No one should say that nirvāṇa is. This is tantamount to succumbing to the heresy of eternalism, because that which is, if it is, always is. And if nirvāṇa is, how would we obtain it if we had not already obtained it? Nevertheless in order to obtain nirvāṇa it is necessary for us to be or not to be. If we are, we will never escape from our condition. And if we be not, we will not be able to escape either. No one should say that nirvāṇa is and is not. No one should say that nirvāṇa neither is nor is not. The four possibilities must be rejected, as they were rejected in the case of being. Whoever accepts any of them, succumbs to a heresy; and whoever succumbs to a heresy may be reborn in an era in which the doctrine is not preached.[15] And what possibility of salvation will he have who is born in an era in which the doctrine is not preached?

Nevertheless, the suspension of judgment on nirvāṇa does not imply the affirmation of *saṃsāra*. That which is cannot be subject to *saṃsāra*, because being and *saṃsāra* are incompatible. Neither can what is not be subject to *saṃsāra*, because it is not. Nothing can be subject to *saṃsāra* and nothing can, because of this, separate itself from *saṃsāra*. Liberation is not possible. If what is were subject to *saṃsāra*, it still could not free itself from it. 'This is once again the four-fold impossibility: these are all the impossibilities. The final proof of this is that the nirvāṇa of which liberation would consist could not begin, because if it began it would cease to be eternal. And for nirvāṇa to begin it is necessary for *saṃsāra* to end.[16] Furthermore, *Saṃsāra* cannot end; and if *saṃsāra* does not end, there is no liberation and there is no nirvāṇa. But if saṃsāra does not end it is unconditioned, like nirvāṇa.

While he does not discover this ultimate unity the ascetic will be able to strive after salvation. This striving is only justified because he who has not discovered the doctrine, who has not discovered that between *saṃsāra* and nirvāṇa there is no difference[17] must necessarily behave as if *saṃsāra* existed and could end, as if nirvāṇa existed and could begin, as if the contradiction did not imply impossibility, as if impossibility did not imply contradiction, as if the judgment were possible. Once more, space can serve to illustrate the doctrine: space lacks its own essence, and, for this reason, it is spoken of as being void, *śūnya*. Space lacks characteristics and the Master who preached the doctrine lacks characteristics. For this reason, because both are void, it

will be said that "Buddha is like space." And *saṃsāra* and nirvāṇa are like space, as well.

But the other disciples protest, saying that the perfect, the enlightened, the Prince of the world, exists! Why does the Perfect One have to exist? asks Nāgārjuna. If he entered nirvāṇa one cannot say of him that he is the Perfect One, nor that he exists. If he existed, one might say of him, as of all that exists, that he is void, because all existence, insofar as by existence is understood the real existence of that which possesses self-essence, is impossible. Buddha was no more than a name! Consequently it will be possible afterwards to say that we ought to carry a dagger with which to kill him[18] because he whom we would meet would not be Buddha, because Buddha is not. The Blessed One, like all the *dharmas*, lacked, lacks a self-essence. For this reason we will say that the Blessed One is not, was not, shall nol be. And if he was not, he could not preach. If he did not preach, there is no doctrine which can be called his.

He was born, he died. He was not born, he did not die. None of these can be predicated of the Blessed One, because it is not possible to affirm anything. For him the four impossibilities of judgment remain valid. *Saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are empty; the Blessed One and beings are empty.[19] All is void. There is an identity of *saṃsāra* and nirvāṇa. An identity of the Blessed One and beings. But as neither the one nor the others are, why do we affirm this identity in the non-being, which is impossible, considering that everything, in the non-being, is impossible? Should not this non-being also be negated? *Saṃsāra* and nirvāṇa: identical. *Saṃsāra* and nirvāṇa: distinct,

Neither one nor the other. The Blessed One and beings: identical; distinct. Neither the one nor the other. That is the attitude to which the "profound knowledge" compels us. The "common knowledge" can conform itself as well with vulgar and false affirmations. That is why it will be said that the doctrine inspires fear. That is why it is possible to affirm, with Āryadeva, that "it is preferable to possess the ordinary instead of the absolute knowledge: in the former there is something; in the latter, nothing."[20]

Neither the four noble truths of suffering, nor the Saṃgha (monastic community), nor Buddha, nor the doctrine. Nor even the doctrine of the Void. All this anticipates the argument of Śaṅkara: it is not the doctrines opposed to Buddhism that are false, it is the Buddhist doctrines that are false. Furthermore, if all of the Master's teachings are negated, how will the Buddhists accept the teaching of Nāgārjuna as the true teaching of the Master? "There is no origin, there is no destruction?" Then there is neither the origin nor the destruction of suffering. Thus the doctrine of he who once said: "I shall teach you only one thing: the destruction of suffering," is meaningless. By following the Master, if his be the doctrine which Nāgārjuna expounds, the Buddhists have lost themselves on the very paths which they wanted to avoid. This doctrine, like that of the brahmans, is a flight of steps raised in the middle of the path: painfully we climb it only to discover that the steps lead to the void. Why not give up this doctrine? Whatever road one may take in order to realize it, salvation is impossible. The doctrine leads to absurdity. To give up the doctrine of the

Master? And if it be accepted, taking refuge in the absurd?

Nāgārjuna answers: to save oneself, or not to save oneself, . . . To be or not to be : an ingenuous alternative for those who are groping in the dark. Nirvāṇa cannot be. How can one insist on this heresy of salvation if nirvāṇa cannot be, if nothing can be? Nirvāṇa shall not be ours, because neither nirvāṇa is nor are we. Being: the world of appearances. Non-being: the world of appearances. Neither being nor non-being: the world of appearances.

The entire doctrine—if there be a doctrine in all this—resides in the negation of the four possibilities. Furthermore, the statement of the particular problems, even the problem of nirvāṇa, becomes a useless insistence, for it compels one to repeat the same litany.

With the analysis of the concepts of being and non-being the conclusion had been drawn that the negation of being implied the negation of non-being, since the latter was only conceivable in terms of the former. And on analysing the very possibility of negation, as the adversary demanded, it was observed that rigorously speaking only that can be negated which is, as non-being does not allow affirmation or negation. But since, by the same token, being could not be negated, it was impossible to affirm or negate, whether it were being or non-being. When it was said that things are void it did not mean that, though void, things were. The intention was only to point out that the discovery of emptiness demanded the negation of the so-called being. The void does not exist, because, it is not; neither, for the same reason, does the non-void exist. Void and non-void are also reci-

procal terms. Each one of them is unthinkable insofar as it is the other. There is nothing that is not void, but neither is there anything void. That is, to the void one may apply the same four impossibilities. If we speak of the negation of the *dharmas*, this must not be understood as an affirmation of *non-dharmas*: that would be a pure realist formalism. The negation of the *dharmas* is also a negation of the *non-dharmas*. If the negation of being implies the affirmation of non-being, Nāgārjuna must hasten to declare that his negation of being demands a new negation, thus avoiding the affirmation of non-being. Nāgārjuna insists on this in order to make clear that his negation is merely negation and, in no way, affirmation.

Nāgārjuna denies that the *dharmas* possess their own essence, and so that an affirmation does not slip subreptitiously into this negation, he adds that his negation, because it is *dharma*, also lacks self-essence (*svabhāva*) and must be negated. In other words: there is no necessity for it to be negated by a second negation, if it is interpreted as that which it wants to be: a negation and not the affirmation of a negation. To affirm the non-void would imply affirming the void. Nevertheless Nāgārjuna does not affirm the non-void; he says that the non-void cannot be and that, for the same reason, it cannot be the void.[21] It is immaterial if one proceeds from the analysis of being or from the analysis of non-being, since the correlation of the terms is such that the negation of one necessarily determines the negation of the other. The negation of Nāgārjuna does not build a system, nor could it build one without contradicting itself: his negation strikes directly at the very nature of the judgments, which are always

contradictory. By revealing the implicit contradiction in all judgment, the contradiction implicit in the affirmation of any object as real, as endowed with self-essence (*svabhāva*), *instead of building a system he opted for an attitude*, the suspension of judgment. Any other attitude would force him to contradict himself and Nāgārjuna knows it. In the void there is no sense in speaking of affirmations or of negations. There is no sense in speaking of what knows, of the known, of the act of knowledge.[22] Everything is "pacified" (*upaśānta*) in the void, but this does not mean that the void is affirmed. The void also lacks self-essence (*svabhāva*). To speak of the reality or the unreality of the void is, for Nāgārjuna as well, simply a play on words. One has awakened from an illusion, but one must not fall into the error of the man who, victim of a mirage, suddenly exclaims, smitten with pain, *it was not water*.[23]

All this critique is not directed, as one might believe, at the affirmation of an absolute being. This is not a vision of the world *sub specie aeternitatis*, as some[24] believe, nor a nihilism as do so many others.[25] To attribute an affirmation of being, or any affirmation whatsoever, to Nāgārjuna is to ignore the repeated and explicit negations of being which the texts contain. If Nāgārjuna affirms that nothing can be conceived of as being devoid of attributes, it is impossible to conceive of an attribute which is not attribute of a substance, to conclude that Nāgārjuna affirms an ultimate substance devoid of attributes[26] which would be identified with the concept of Śaṅkara's is as arbitrary as to affirm the ultimate reality of an attribute devoid of substance. Nāgārjuna maintains that it is impossible to affirm any entity

whatsoever. "We are not nihilists!" exclaim the commentators of Nāgārjuna, echoing the latter's thought. "We are not eternalists!" is a warning which is more than evident. Both being and non-being should be negated. But the *negation* of being and that of non-being must be equally negated—not affirmed—*as the affirmation.* Thus the impossible is both the negation and the affirmation. The impossible is the judgment, and that is what must be understood by negation of the affirmation and negation of the negation. To affirm being and to affirm non-being were the two extremes—eternalism and nihilism —rejected by Buddha. The questions which Buddha declared to be meaningless are the same ones which Nāgārjuna condemns: the affirmation of being, the affirmation of non-being, were positions which Buddha refuted by resorting to the doctrine of causes and conditions, that is, the doctrine of the "dependent origination" (*pratītyasamutpāda*). But this negation of being as well as non-being must not be interpreted in the sense of "a reconciliation of contradictories, as has also been maintained,[27] since Nāgārjuna says that the contradictories are irreconcilable on account of their not being able to be present at the same time, in the same place.[28] To admit the possibility of this reconciliation of the contradictories is like "wishing to have half of the hen in the fire, in order to roast it, and the other half outside the fire in order for it to continue to lay eggs."[29] If one admits the co-presence of the contradictories, one admits, at the same time, the co-absence of these same contradictories, to affirm both terms simultaneously is to negate them.[30]

A famous hymn of the Rig Veda[31] says that in the beginning there was neither being nor non-being, there was neither death nor immortality. Nāgārjuna tells us that being, and non-being, death and immortality were not, in the beginning nor ever, because nothing can be, absolutely, without it also being impossible to affirm that nothing can, absolutely, not be. *Being*, *non-being*, *being and non-being*, *neither being nor non-being*: these are the four possibilities, and Nāgārjuna wants to apply bis method of negation to all of them. The difficulty lies in the negation of negation itself, an apparently absurd claim, as any negation—and it matters little what is negated within it—implies its own immediate affirmation. In other words, what Nāgārjuna negates is the possibility of the judgment, and this possibility cannot be negated without contradiction, since in any negation the judgment is self-affirmed. When the *Nyāya-sūtras* referred the problem of time to that of knowledge and found therein the foundation of time, they suggested, without proposing it, the reality which affirmed itself and which, in no way, could be negated. There was a *dharma*, that of knowledge, which was immediately affirmed. This was the difficult problem which Nāgārjuna had to confront. Finally he had to face the most delicate of the Buddhist problems: that of Nirvāṇa, since to negate reality to this *dharma*, which had always been considered as being unnegatable, could place his doctrine on the margin of Buddhism.

In conclusion Nāgārjuna orders the suspension of the judgment and this attitude is a consequence of the analysis of the four possibilities: being, non-being, being and non-being, neither being nor non-

being. Nāgārjuna does not tire in reiterating the fact that no thesis can be attributed to him. It has been maintained[32] that his doctrine coincides *exactly*, in the negation of those four possibilities, with the platonic doctrine of the view developed in Book V of *The Republic*. In fact, there is a similarity, with this fundamental difference: that for Nāgārjuna every judgment is *doxa*, opinion; that it is not possible to say of a judgment that it is true, nor that it is false, nor that it is true and false, nor that it is neither true nor false, because the four possibilities negated of the *dharmas* are the same ones which must be negated of the judgments. Thereby Nāgārjuna does not negate the effectiveness of the sources of knowledge, since by negating it he would have had to abstain from the discussion, as his later critics wanted, and thus he would be shutting himself up within a dogmatic silence. His negation is directed against the judgment, and is consequently a critical attitude. The problem which needs to be solved—and this has been repeated also in the west in the last years[33]—is not that of the effectiveness of the reasoning, but rather that of the possibility of true judgment which gives content to the reasoning. If the negation of the four possibilities justifies his method being designated as negativist, the negation of negation itself understood as judgment justifies his method being also designated as epochistic.[34] For Nāgārjuna as for Plato, "there is necessarily ignorance of that which is not." But for Nāgārjuna there is ignorance also of that which is, because both being and non-being *are* not. Not being the *dharmas*, the proof of their being is impossible, and does not affect the efficiency of reasoning. Neither

is possible the proof that they are not, since there is ignorance of the non-being.

The Vaibhāṣikas interpret Nirvāṇa positively: nirvāṇa is not the mere extinction of desire. In Nirvāṇa desire is extinguished, and nirvāṇa *is*. The Sarvāstivādins said that nirvāṇa was, because the knowledge the object of which is nirvāṇa cannot have a non-being for its object. The Mādhyamikas reject this positive determination of nirvāṇa : for this reason they have no other recourse but the silence of Buddha. The impossibility of being has been demonstrated. Hence nirvāṇa cannot be said to be. Shall it be said that Nirvāṇa is not? Shall it be said that Nirvāṇa is mere extinction? This last possibility is expressly negated by Nāgārjuna and his disciples. For them, to maintain that nirvāṇa is not—in general, to maintain that something is not—means, as we have seen, to succumb to the heresy of nihilism. However, eastern and western critics alike have called Nāgārjuna's doctrine nihilist. The latter can echo the words of Buddha: "Falsely, mistakenly they accuse me of preaching destruction." Candrakīrti protested: "We are not nihilists!" Āryadeva too defended himself against this accusation. And Nāgārjuna had to defend himself repeatedly against the same accusation. The preaching *against* nihilism is one of the first aims of Buddha's teaching.

Ever since Burnouf spoke of nihilism (Nāgārjuna's would be a "scholastic nihilism"[35]) the word has had an astonishing success in the West. But the reference to nothingness as the ultimate explanation of reality is, if one examines the texts, more frequent in the West than in the East. Even the most

authoritative scholars of India have made this error. Dasgupta[36] insists in calling Nāgārjuna's position a nihilism. And when he has tried to point out that Nāgārjuna's position is not nihilist, he succumbs to the other "heresy": that of maintaining that Nāgārjuna's vision of the world corresponds to the affirmation of an eternal and immutable substance as the ultimate reality. Nāgārjuna repeats *ad nauseum* that none of the four possibilities can be affirmed of nirvāṇa. If one wished nirvāṇa to be the ultimate reality, then it will be said of this reality that it is the extinction of all words.[37] The ultimate reality is not expressible.[38] The ultimate reality is peace. The attitude in face of this ultimate reality is silence. Is all a void? Why then ask questions about that which has already been declared void ? What is the meaning of such questions, empty like all *dharmas*, about a *dharma* which, because it is void, cannot supply an answer. And finally, why ask for the content of the doctrine, if Buddha did not anywhere preach any doctrine?

A harsh fate is reserved for the nihilists: a rebirth in hell.[39] The affirmation of being leads to that. Although they uphold a doctrine which is also false the eternalists would deserve a milder fate: rebirth in better conditions of existence.[40] None of these doctrines assures one of salvation, because none of them pays any attention to the absolute reality in which all notions of existence and non-existence, of being and non-being, of sin and virtue, have been suppressed. Common understanding cannot go, say the Mādhyamikas, beyond the notions of being and non-being, and for common understanding those notions are valid.

Moreover, the doctrine of being or that of non-being is preferable to the doctrine of *śūnyatā* itself if the latter is wrongly interpreted. The doctrine of *śūnyatā* emerges when it is understood that what has dependent existence is void, and as there are no *dharmas* the existence of which are independent, there is no *dharma* which is not void: the void too is void. All *dharmas* are empty like the cities of the Gandharvas[41] and that is why the Blessed One would have said that, by withdrawing the consciousness from every *dharma*, we should reach emptiness. Let it not be said that the void is non-existence. Let it not be said that the void is and, being, is eternal. There can be no eternity in emptiness.[42] And let it not be said that the void is not eternal, because the void lacks essence and what lacks essence can be neither eternal nor non-eternal. Emptiness is void: *śūnyatā* is *śūnyatā*. Let it not be said that nirvāṇa is an "unconditional condition in which all contradictions are reconciled." Was it not noted that it was not possible to affirm any simultaneity of being and non-being? Let it not be said either that there is neither being nor non-being in the void. But let all of this be said, any one of these things, if one is within the order of superficial truth (*saṃvṛtti*), since within this superficial truth are valid the four holy truths, the doctrine of the dependent origination of things, the aspiration to nirvāṇa, the notions of being and of non-being, and even the very notion of emptiness. Let one proceed *as if* this were the absolute truth (*paramārtha*). Let it be recommended to kings that they abstain from sin and from death; let it be recommended to men that they master their bodies and not only their enemies, because even enemies can

dominate their enemies. Let man be told to abstain from lust, from greed, to "take his food as if it were a medicine,"[43] to show reverence for the "three jewels": the community, the Master, the Doctrine. Let all this be declared. But let it be remembered that nothing of all this is. Nothing is in itself and nothing is void. And the void is not nothingness but rather negation of nothingness. "We do not say *śūnya.* We do not say *nonśūnya,*"[44] because anything we might say, we would have to affirm it, and nothing can be affirmed.

Why be afraid, if nothing of what we expected remains? Shall we proceed like those who, upon listening to the words of Buddha, sob : *I will not be* in nirvāṇa! ? Why sob, if *one is not*? How can one sob, if *one is* ? This doctrine of emptiness would enable one to understand that nothing is destroyed, annihilated, in nirvāṇa. Salvation and passion have the same taste, because they have no taste, as the ultimate knowledge teaches, because in the absolute (*paramārtha*) no discrimination whatsoever is possible. The absolute truth is beyond all words. It is silent like the flight of those who arrive at the absolute, says Candrakīrti: royal peacocks which soar flying in the wind produced by its two wings, the wing of accumulated merits, and the wing of accumulated knowledge. A flight, without any support, in the wind of empty space.

The word limits us, because the word can only express being and non-being. And Nāgārjuna remains silent.

This is the method and this is the conclusion of the method. Silence, quietude, pacification which not even the founder of the doctrine had dared to express by means of words.

NOTES

PROLOGUE

1. Bu-Ston, *History of Buddhism*, trans. by E. Obermiller, II, p. 122 & ff.

2. Nāgārjuna could not have been at Nālanda. But it is believed that his effigy has been recognized in one of the sculptures of the famous 'university'. Vide H. D. Sankalia, *The University of Nālanda*, plate XIV, 2nd revised and enlarged edition, Oriental Publishers, Delhi, 1972.

3. Merutunga, *Prabandhacintāmaṇi*, trans. by Tawney, p. 194 & ff. Bibliotheca Indica.

4. Hiuan Tsang, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, II, p. 213, trans. by S. Beal. Reprinted by Paragon Book Corp., New York, 1968.

5. Bu-Ston, *History of Buddhism*, II, p. 127.

6. I Tsing, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion*, p. 34, trans. by J. Takakusu. Reprinted by M. Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1966. Early edition in 1896 by Clarendon Press, London.

7. Buhler, *Indische Studien*, XIV, p. 408.

8. S. Chandra Das, *Life of Nāgārjuna*, JASB, Vol. 51, p. 115 & ff.

9. H. Kern, *Histoire du Bouddhisme dans l' Inde*, Vol. II, p. 437.

10. M. Walleser, *The Life of Nāgārjuna from Tibetan and Chinese Sources*, (Hirth Anniversary Volume), pp. 421-445.

NOTES: CHAPTER I

1. Br. U. 6. 2; Ch. U. 5. 3.

2. Maitrī U. : 1.4.

3. Dhammapada, 34.

4. *Questions of King Milinda*, p. 335 & ff.

5. *Yogasūtras*, II, 15.

H. Kern, *Manual of Indian Buddhism*, p. 47. Reprinted by Indological Book House, Delhi.

6. See the commentaries of Vijñānabhikṣu and Aniruddha on I, 1.

7. *Dīgha N.* XV, 21. If consciousness be extinguished after having descended inside the mother's womb, the individual could not be formed. Consciousness can also be eradicated.

8. In later Buddhist literature the Gandharva is a being who, although material, possesses the characteristic of space: it can penetrate everything, without encountering any resistance. It lies in expectation of its 'reincarnation' and, for this purpose, comes upon the couple which can assure it the new form of life which corresponds to it in accordance with its past actions. At the moment of the union it is a rival who, whether it shall be a man or a woman, hates the father or the mother and is seized with a feeling of lust for the mother or the father. (*Abhidharmakośa*, III, 15 a-b). We might say that this is a case of an 'Oedipus complex'. Moreover in one early text the presence of the Gandharva is considered indispensable to procreation (*Majjhima N.* II, 156). *Kathāvatthu*, VIII, 2 mentions the existence of the "intermediate beings," a notion which must be related to that of the Gandharvas.

According to Louis de la Vallee Poussin (*L'Inde* . . . p. 279 & ff. ; *Nirvāṇa*, p. 28; notes on Abhidharmakośa, I, c).

One has to seek, among these conceptions, for one of the roots of the doctrine of transmigration, which would have nothing aryan or brahmanical; it is nothing else but the "savage" belief that the dead live again in other animal or human bodies. Those who, like de la Vallée Poussin, maintain that the origin of the doctrine of transmigration must be sought for among the pre-aryan populations, base themselves on the fact that this doctrine does not appear in the vedic hymns. But perhaps it is worth observing that in the vedic hymns (*Rg. Veda*, X, 85, 22) the Gandharvas appear in the wedding ceremonies like *rivals* of the groom whom they try to replace by claiming the bride for themselves. This example also would indicate, and not only in the

animist buddhism, a notion where the Gandharva is "a spirit who is in search of a womb."

Later speculation used the belief in the Gandharvas to explain the apparent discontinuity, spatial as well as temporal, between the two successive existences: the Gandharva, which nourished itself on smells in the expectation of the right moment, filled the interval between those two existences and would cover the distance which separated them in space.

9. Warren, *Buddhism in Translations*, p. 239; and the note in Oldenberg, *Le Bouddha*, p. 225.

10. Br. U. 4.4.2-3.

11. E. Senart, *Un roi de* l' *Inde*. (Revue des deux Mondes, 1 March 1889), p. 86.

12. Cf. L. de la Vallee Poussin, *Nirvāṇa*, p. 52.

13. S. Dasgupta, *Message of Buddhism*, Calcutta, 132, p. 15.

14. *Majjhima N.* III, 79.

15. *Majjhima N.* I, 246.

16. We use the word with the meaning given to it by Brentano when in his classification of the psychic activities he rearranges the phenomena traditionally described as intellectual in the essentially different forms of 'representation', in which the object is simply *given*, and the 'judgement', in which the object is accepted as true or as false. It appears that to call the state of the first contemplation 'representative' and not simply 'intellectual' corresponds to the descriptions of *Majjhima N.* 36 and 85. The pleasure and the joy experienced in the first contemplation would be something like the 'hedonic tone' of cenesthesia.

17. *Dīgha N.* I.

18. *Dīgha N.* III, 229; *Aṅguttara N.* I, 197; II, 46.

19. *Abhidharmakośa*, V. 22; see commentary on *Yogasūtras* IV, 33.

20. "Some maintain that the world is finite so that a way could be traced around it." *Dīgha N.* I, 22.

21. *Majjhima N.* I, 429.

22. *Saṁyutta N.* V, 437. See de la Vallée Poussin, *Le Dogme et la Philosophie du Bouddhisme*, Paris, 1880, p. 84 & ff.; Oldenberg, *Le Bouddha*, p. 201.

23. "It was an ancient custom in the country, and it still subsists in one part or other, that in the ultimate phase of his

life someone would give to his son or to his favourite disciple the most secret object. This is what is called 'the closed fist of the master' (*ācāryamuṣṭi*). V. Bhattacharya, *The Basic Conception of Buddhism*, p. 17.

24. *Dīgha N.* II, 100.

25. Oldenberg, *Le Bouddha*, p. 274, opted, by basing himself on *Majjhima N.* 63°, for the solution which seems correct to us. According to it "the orthodox doctrine of the ancient community would expressly demand from its devotees that they renounce to know nothing about the existence or the non-existence of the Tathāgata after death." But, in what regards the existence of the non-existence of an "I" which would constitute a special entity, he opts for a solution which it is difficult to reconcile with the previous one: "the author of the dialogue is very close to conclude by the negation of the I; it could almost be said that, if he has not wished to express this conclusion knowingly, he has not for that matter actually expressed it", (p. 271 & ff). We affirm that this conclusion can be reconciled with difficulty with the previous one because, as Oldenberg himself says, the answer "the I does not exist", given by those who believe in the annihilation, signifies that the I "annihilates itself in death." Oldenberg adds that Buddha avoids negating the existence of the I "solely not to hurt the limited mind of his listener." Compare this with the criticism of Oldenberg in F. W. Thomas, *Buddhist Thought*, p. 127 and ff.

26. *Dīgha N.* I, 27.

27. See especially *Dīgha N.* I, 13 and 34.

28. *Majjhima N.* I, 139.

29. Aśoka ... called the groups in turns and asked: "What is the doctrine of Buddha?" Then the eternalists said: "He was an eternalist. The nihilists said that he taught the annihilation of being." *Points of Controversy*, p. 6.

30. Indian thought did not conceive of an eternity *a parte post* nor of an eternity a *parte ente*. It only admitted these concepts for the non-existent.

31. Louis de la Vallée Poussin, *Bouddhisme*, 4a, p. 55.

32. *Śālistamba Sūtra*, p. 87 (G. Tucci, *Il Buddhismo*, p. 77).

33. *Siddhi*, p. 158 and 157.

34. Destruction (*nirodha*) has two forms: "destruction by

means of knowledge" (*pratisaṃkhyānirodha*) which is attained through the process of concentrations and by the comprehension of the truths of the doctrine; and "destruction *not* by knowledge" (*apratisaṃkhyānirodha*), which is attained when a series is interrupted by the exhaustion of the causes and conditions necessary for the emergence of new dharmas. Only in this sense can one speak, when a flame is extinguished, of a *nirvāṇa*, as in *Therigatha*, 115 ("Oh, the nirvâṇa of the lamp"!).

35. *Aṅguttara N.* I, 173.

36. *Kalpas.* The universe too is, in this sense, subject to the cycle of the existences. *Karma*, the 'collective' action, comes to exhaust itself and determines the consumption of the universe. Then there remains the empty space where, on account of this 'collective' action of the previous universe, light winds shall rise and from them another universe is created. (Those who in this universe have committed actions which require a future existence in infernal worlds are reborn, if this universe is in process of destruction, in another one which does not lie in the same process.)

In some sects it is believed that the wind carries from other universes the 'seeds' necessary for the creation. The wind is that which in one of the hells brings back to life the beings which have been reduced to ashes so that they might continue to suffer. (See *Abhidharmakośa*, particularly Vol. II, p. 149 and ff.; 164; 181 and ff.; 211).

37. *Dīgha N.* I, 18. Compare with the famous passage in Br, U. 1.4, 1-5.

38. In Aśvaghoṣa, *Buddhacarita*, XVI, 23. René Grousset, *Les Philosophies Indiennes*, Vol. I, p. 151 and ff., gives a very useful summary of *Kośa, Ak., Mv., Vv., SS, Siddhi.* The discussion on the unique cause (p. 170 and ff) has been, however, excessively simplified by Grousset.

39. This analysis is that which is presented in *Kośa*, Vol. II, 64d.

40. The same analysis would be used against those who maintain that the unique cause is Time, or Space (*diś*), or ether (*ākāśa*), or the Ātman, or Brahma, or Pūrvakoṭi, or Svabhāva (with regard to the last two, see the notes of de la Vallée Pous-

sin, *Siddhi*, p. 30), or Śakra (*Siddhi*, 30 & 350), or Prajāpati, or any other entity which *is* not the cause of the world (*Kośa*, V.7).

41. Last objection, for definitions: "That which engenders is not eternal; that which is not eternal is not omnipresent; that which is not omnipresent is not real" (*Siddhi*, p. 30).

42. *Mahābhārata*, XIII, 7507 and ff.

43. *Majjhima N.* III, 63.

44. The author, Vasubandhu, probably lived in the fifth century.

45. With the exclusion, as always when one speaks of the conditioned origin, of the non impermanent *dharmas*: space and the two 'destructions'.

46. We have deemed it convenient to translate *hetu* by *cause*, and *pratyaya* by *condition*. In each case the context shall show the scope of the meaning which must be given to the word. *Hetu*, for instance, is also the name which is given, in reasoning, to the judgement on which the truth of the conclusion is founded (Essentially, *hetu*=*pratyaya*. See, Mk. p. 76).

47. "Because it affects the whole current of life" (*santāna*), the whole series. Stcherbatski, *Central Conception of Buddhism*, p. 35.

48. Cf. Stcherbatski, *Buddhist Logic*, I., p. 138.

49. Bertrand Russell expressly refers to the buddhist conception of the 'series' to expound his own conception of objects: "When I say that there are no 'things' I have not yet expressed any definite idea. I shall try to clarify what I think. Let us suppose that we discern in the darkness of night the luminous ray of a lighthouse which burns on the land and on the sea. In certain ways this ray of light maintains its identity and yet we do not think of it as a 'thing' or, let us suppose that we hear the 'Star-Spangled Banner' being sung. This is a song, but we do not call it a 'thing' but that it is a series of notes, each of which is, by its essence, of a very short duration. If I say now that there are no 'things', I wish to say that tables, chairs, loaves and similar objects are constituted in the same way as the luminous ray and the song, that they too are a series of more or less homogeneous phenomena, bound among themselves, not by virtue of their substantial identity, but by a certain causal connection.

Still less is this a new idea. Already the early Buddhists of

the time of King Aśoka had formulated it." (*Physics and Metaphysics, Revista de Occidente*, no. LXXI, p. 149-50).

Stcherbatski who frequently quotes Bertrand Russell analyses the similarity between the two conceptions, especially in *Buddhist Logic*, I, p. 142 and ff. Likewise, S. Mukerjee in *The Buddhist Philosophy of Universal Flux*, p. 17 and ff.

50. *Majjhima N.* 121° & 122°.

51. *Vajracchedika* (*Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XLIV).

52. I Tsing, *Record of the Buddhist Religion*, p. 202, trans. by J. Takakusu. Reprinted by M. Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1966. Early edition by Clarendon Press, London.

53. See R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 30. Otto, who in addition to being a theologian was also a great indologist, sees in śūnya the equivalent of "what is true of the strange 'nothingness' of our mystics." He observes: "This aspiration for the 'void' and for becoming void, no less than the aspiration of our western mystics for 'nothing' and for becoming nothing, must seem a kind of lunacy to anyone who has no inner sympathy for the esoteric language and ideograms of mysticism, and lacks the matrix from which these came necessarily to birth. To such a one Buddhism itself will be simply a morbid sort of pessimism. But in fact the 'void' of the eastern, like the 'nothing' of the western, mystic is a numinous ideogram of the 'wholly other'. (*Idea of the Holy*, tr. by John W. Harvey, O.U.P. (1952).

NOTES: CHAPTER II

1. Mk. I, 1.

2. See SDS, p. 19.

3. The analysis of the variations which this from of conditionality presents is probably later than Nāgārjuna; hence it is that the latter does not refer to them.

4. It must be observed that the comparisons of this type, which occur frequently in the school of Nāgārjuna, are to be found in the *sūtras* where emptiness is spoken of.

5. Mk. IV, Ak. 6.

6. Mk. XX, 4.

7. Mk. XX, 20.

8. Mk VIII, 1.
9. Mk. II.
10. Mk. II, 14.
11. De la Vallee Poussin, *Bouddhisme*, 4th edition, with extreme disdain: "It is painful for the editor of the Mādhyamika texts to copy and re-read indefinitely *toutes ces niaiseries*," Note 2, p. 197 (1st edn., 1909).
12. *Kośa*, IV, 4.
13. *Kośa*, IV, p. 7.
14. *Kośa*, IV, p. 8.
15. *Kośa*, II, 47 a-b.
16. Mk. VII.
17. Mk. VII, 11.
18. Mk., Ak., VII, 16.
19. Mk. I, 7.
20. Mk. XXI, 1.
21. *Atharva Veda*, XIX, 53, 4.
22. *Maitrī U.*, VI, 14-16.
23. *Daśapadārthaśāstra*, I, 3; II, 2, 2. (Ui. *Vaiśeṣika Philosophy*. p. 95, 106.) Choukhamba Sanskrit Series, Varanasi, 1962.
24. Since the beginnings of Indian speculation there exists a distinction between *ākāśa* and *diś*. Ākāśa could correspond to ether, better than to space: It is the medium of the propagation of sound, of its support; *diś* is the medium of location of the objects, It is the former, and not the latter, that is for Buddhism an unconditioned, although the difference between these two concepts does not interest Buddhism as it does the brahmanical systems, where the problem of sound and of its production or its eternity had a great importance. (See Stcherbatski, *La Théorie de la Connaissance*, p. 40 and ff.).
25. *Kathāvatthu* (*Points of Controversy*): especially p. 85 and ff. *Kośa* II, 45 c-d and ff.
26. *Kośa*, I, 43 c-d. As an exception, this parallel: "For I would like to ask those who have this idea, if they clearly conceive that two indivisibles touch each other, if it be everywhere they are but one single thing, and yet the two together are indivisible; and if it be not everywhere, then it is but in one part, consequently they have parts, therefore they are not indivisible." (Pascal, *Pensées*, Vol. II, p. 290, ed. Havet).

27. *Points of Controversy*, p. 109.

28. *Siddhi*, p. 72.

29. *Questions of King Milinda*. (VE85)

30. In the doctrine which could be called 'temporalism' (*kālavāda*), anterior to Buddhism, one could encounter the contradiction which implied the time understood as reality where it is possible to distinguish the past from the present and from the future. And it would have hinted at the hypothesis of the existence of a second changing time, which accompanies the absolute time; this solution is similar, it seems to us, to the division of causes into primary and secondary causes. (See Stcherbatski, *La Théorie de la Connaissance*, p. 14: This changing time "accompanies the absolute time and offers the complementary proximate cause by means of which the change of the phenomena and their alternation in time are conditioned").

31. II, 1, 39-43.

32. II, 1, 39.

33. An evidently false comparison.

34. "By *svabhāva* is meant this innate (*nija*), natural (*akṛtrima*) essence which pertains properly to fire in the past, in the future, which does not exist after having existed, and which is not—as are the heat of water, the shore here and the shore there, the long and the short—dependent on causes and conditions". Mk. p. 263.

35. Mk. XIX, 1-4.

36. *Kośa*, III, 85 b-c.

37. Mk. XIX, 5.

38. Āryadeva (SST[1], p. 177; T[2] p. 76; Vaidya, p. 143) argues thus: What is that which allows us to affirm the reality of time? Do we infer it from change, with a reasoning which proceeds from the effect to the cause? When we speak of the reality of time do we speak of its eternity, by considering it an unconditioned *dharma*? Perforce, since in this sense we do not consider it thus it would be either conditioned, and for that matter with origin, or inexistent. If it is unconditioned it is a *dharma*, etcetera. The future is in the past or it is not in the past: if it is in the past, it is past; and, if it is not in the past, time is not a *dharma*. Shall we base ourselves on the past to affirm, without anything

more, time? But the past does not exist, save that the future is negated, since the past to be past requires the characteristics of the future, without which it could not happen to be the past; and if it is affirmed that it has the characteristics of the future, still less will it exist, since by having the characteristics of the future it cannot be the past. Here reappears the discussion presented and debated in the schools of the little vehicle; and it is noted that the school carries to its ultimate consequences the position of the Sautrāntikas. To speak of the change of the characteristics, to explain time, means either to confuse it all or to deny it all: it is not possible to speak of a future which loses the characteristics of the future; it would be like speaking of the fire which loses its heat. The future, if it is (and if the future is not, how is time, considering that by time is meant the past, present and future?), shall be not future but present, whatever be its characteristics. If it be maintained that each one of these three moments of time has its own characteristics, it shall be concluded that all is present, because to have characteristics is to exist really, presently. In fine, the *dharma* called time is nothing but a word.

39. De la Vallée Poussin, Bouddhisme, p. 191.

40. Cf. Candrakīrti, (trans. Stcherbatski, *Nirvāṇa*, p. 117).

41. Mk. IX.

42. Mk. Ak., X, 2.

43. Mk. V, 5.

44. Candrakīrti, com. on Mk. XVIII, 8.

45. The *svabhāva* of fire would, according to V. Bhattāchārya (*The Basic Conception of Buddhism*, Calcutta, 1934, p. 76 and ff.), be its non-origin and not its heat.

NOTES : CHAPTER III

1. Vv. I.
2. Vv. II.
3. Vv. XI.
4. Vv. XX.
5. Vv. XXXII.
6. Vv. XXXIII.
7. Trans. T. Stcherbatski, p. 164 (?)

8. Cf. *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, IX, 111 and ff. De la Vallée Poussin, Mk. p. 81, considers, unjustly, as the archstone of the 'madhyamika' dialectic, the frequent sophism of the impossibility for a son to be born. (If there is no father, there is no son; for that reason a son cannot be born, because for that to be it would be necessary to have a father).

9. Cf. Stcherbatski, *ibid.*, p. 145; and E. Burnouf, *Introduction à l 'Histoire du Bouddhisme Indian*, 2nd edition, p. 500.

10. Vv. XXXV.

11. SST2, p. 9.

12. Vv. XLVI.

13. Vv. LII.

14. Mk. XVII, p. 31.

15. *Buddhacarita*, II, 26, 40, 54 (SBE XLIX.) The series of actions and of fruits (Mk. XVII) is like that successive creation of magic beings, none of which has a true reality. Cf. *Siddhi*, p. 770 and ff.

16. Vv. XXIII.

17. SS. SVI, 25.

18. Candrakīrti, trans. Stcherbatski, p. 137.

19. Vv. LV.

20. Vv. LIX.

21. Kumārila, *Ślokavārttika*, V. 9 (trans. G. Jha).

22. *Ibid.*, V, 29.

23. II, ii.

24. Cf. Dharmakīrti. *Nyāyabindu*, II, 12, and Dharmottara, *Nyāyabinduṭīkā*, trans. Stcherbatski, *Buddhist Logic*, Vol. II, p. 60. Stcherbatski, *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 363 and ff.; *La Théorie de la Connaissance et la Logique*, p. 217 and ff. S. Mukerjee, *Buddhist Philosophy of Universal Flux*, p. 409 and ff.

25. Vv. LXV.

26. II, i. 8-20.

27. Nāgārjuna's treatise analyses this argument, which would prove that the treatise is logically posterior to the *Nyāyasūtras*.

28. Vedāntasūtras, *Sacred Books of the Hindus*, Vol. V. Commentary on II, 2, 32.

29. Vedāntasūtras, S. B. E., Vol. XXXIV, p. 427. Commentary on II, 2, 32.

30. Vedāntasūtras, S. B. E., Vol. XLVIII, p. 515. Commentary on II, 2, 30.

31. Aniruddha, Commentary on Sāṁkhyasūtras, I, 43.

32. SDS, Ch. II, p. 23.

33. But not in Tantravārttika, trans. G. Jha, p. 116 and 168.

NOTES : CHAPTER IV

1. Mk. V.
2. Nāgārjuna, *Mahāprajñāpāramitā* (J. Przyluski, *Le Concile de Rājagṛha*, Ch. III).
3. Mk. XII.
4. See Ch. I, note 34.
5. *Kośa*, II, 35 d.
6. *Kośa*, I, 29 b-c.
7. *Kośa*, III, 90 c-d.
8. SSTI, p. 176.
9. Mv. 2
10. Mk. V, 1.
11. *Kośa*, II, 55 d.
12. SL. 61.
13. R 2, 5.
14. SL. 66.
15. SSTI, p. 82.
16. Mk. XVI, p. 10.
17. Mk. XXV, 20.
18. A. H. Francke, *A Lower Ladākhi Version of the Kesar-saga*, p. I. Compare this with this one: "Do not tolerate any obstacle, external or internal, to the elevation of your mind. If you encounter a Buddha on your way, kill him!" Buddha "was a megalomaniac. . . I would have killed him, if I had been together with him." (From the texts of the Japanese Zen sect quoted in E. Steinilber-Oberlin, *Les Sectes Bouddhiques Japanaises*, 4th edn., p. 146 and 182). De la Vallée Poussin, *Bouddhisme*, 4th edn., p. 406, quotes an interesting tantric passage which naturally has another meaning: "One must tell lies . . . and kill all the Buddhas." Aṅg. N., XV, 7 says (and the passage is quite

curious indeed) that only a man who has not yet entered into the path can wish to wound and shed the blood of a Buddha.

19. Mk. XXII, 16.

20. SS Vaidya, p. 225.

21. Mk. XIII, 7.

22. Mk. XXIII, 15 and ff.

23. R. 55.

24. Stcherbatski, *La Théorie de la Connaissance*, p. IX. Also, E. Obermiller, *Acta Orientalia*, Vol. IX, 1931, p. 95, who maintains that "having reached the highest point of the purest, most extreme monism" is the reason on account of which the later Tibetan authors see in the *Uttaratantra* a Mādhyamika work of the school characterized by the method of reduction to the absurd typical of Nāgārjuna.

25. "Pure nihilism", "quite categorical nihilism," "integral nihilism," says De la Vallée Poussin, (*Bouddhisme*, 4th edn., p. 25; 131, 186, 195), although later, hesitatingly, he calls the Mādhyamikas "pseudo-nihilists" and "casi-nihilists" (*Mélanges Chinois et Bouddhiques*, Vol. I, p. 390) against Stcherbatski, who transforms them into 'monists'. The hesitation of De la Vallée Poussin appears to seek justification in these words: "... if at times we may affirm something about Buddhism, it is rare if we might not affirm and demonstrate the contrary". (*Bouddhisme*, 1st end. and 4th end., p. 139).

26. E. Rosenberg, *Die Probleme der Buddhistischen*, p. 109. S. Vidyabhushana, *Journal of the Buddhist Text Society*, 1895. Vol. III, II, 9, also had made this facile approximation. Cf. N. Dutt, *Aspects of Mahāyāna Buddhism*, p. 194.

27. S. C. Vidyabhushana, *A History of Indian Logic*, p. 255.

28. Mk., XXV, 11 and 14; (SST2, p. 8).

29. SDS, p· 22.

30. Mk. XXVII, 28.

31. X, 129.

32. Cf., H. N. Randle, *Indian Logic*, p. 62 n. 2.

33. L. Chestov, *Le Pouvoir des Clefs*, p. 369.

34. Cf. S. Shayer, *Mahāyāna Doctrines of Salvation*, p. 39.

35. E. Burnouf, *Introduction*, 2nd edn. p. 499.

36. S. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, passim.

37. SST2, p. 82.
38. Mv., 1.
39. R. 43.
40. R. 43, 44, 57.
41. Mk. IV, 9 Ak.
42. Mk. XXIII, 13.
43. SL, 41.
44. Mk. XXII, 11.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Ak.	*Akutobhaya*
Aṅg. N.	*Aṅguttara Nikāya*
Br. U.	*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*
Ch. U.	*Chāndogya Upaniṣad*
Digha N.	*Dīgha Nikāya*
Kośa.	*Abhidharmakośa*, of Vasubandhu. (Trans. by Louis de la Vallee Poussin, Paris, 1923-31).
Majjhim N.	*Majjhima Nikāya*
Mk.	*Mūlamadhyamakārikās*
Mv.	*Mahāyānaviṃśaka*
R.	*Ratnāvali*
S. T.	*Suhṛllekha*
Sam. N.	*Saṃyutta Nikāya*
SBE	Sacred Books of the East
SDS	*Sarvadarśanasaṃgraha.* Trans. : E. B. Cowell & A. E. Gough, London, 1914.
Siddhi	*Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi*, cf. Hiuan Tsang. Trans. : L. de la Vallée Poussin, Paris, 1928-29.
SS	*Śataśāstra*, of Aryadeva. Trans. : G: *Tucci, Pr-Diṅnāga Buddhist Texts on Logic from Chinese Sources,* Baroda, 1929; *Le Cento Strofe, Studi e materiali di Storia delle Religioni,*

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SST1 Tucci, *Le Cento Strofe*

SST2 Tucci, *Pre-Diṅnāga Buddhist Texts on Logic from Chinese Sources.*

Vv. *Vigrahavyāvartanī*

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This book is an English Translation of V. Fatone's Spanish Original on the Philosophy of Nāgārjuna—a famous Buddhist Philosopher who lived in the second century A.D. Until Fatone wrote this book it was thought that Nāgārjuna was a nihilist. So firm has been the tradition that certain eminent scholars still continue to use this term to designate his School. But the present author has tried to prove that Nāgārjuna is not a nihilist. Although the fundamental idea of Nāgārjuna's system is that nothing exists, still he believes in the existence of one single substance which is the world subspecie aeternitatis.

Translated into lucid English, the book presents a faithful interpretation of Nāgārjuna's Philosophy.

Professor Vicente Fatone was born February 12, 1903 in Buenos Aires. He joined the University of Buenos Aires in 1926 as Professor of Philosophy and in 1928 was appointed to the Chair of Metaphysics and Theory of Knowledge in the National University, Paraná. From 1932 to 1940 he was Professor of Logic and Psychology at Mariano Acosta Teacher Training College. In 1937 he was awarded a fellowship by the National Council of Culture. In 1940 he was appointed to the Chair of History of Religions in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of La Plata. He became one of the founders of A.S.C.U.A. In 1956 he acted as the Argentinian delegate to the IX General Assembly of U.N.E.S.C.O. In the same year he held the Chair of Ethics in the Department of Philosophy, University of Buenos Aires. In 1956 he also acted as an adviser in the expansion of the School of Technology of Bahía Blanca into the (Argentinian) National University of the South. His last three years, he was Professor of Philosophy and History of Religions in the Faculty of Arts, University of Buenos Aires.

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